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WHY THE LEAGUE HAS FAILED

by

"VIGILANTES"

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WHY THE LEAGUE HAS FAILED

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INTRODUCTION

THE STORY of why the League has failed is a big slice of world history from the Great War until to-day. It is difficult to compress so vast a subject into 27,000 words. It is hardly possible to be impartial in relation to events that are influenced by our own attitude, and which in turn are deciding the fate of ourselves and our children.

In this book the three students of international affairs who write under the collective pen-name of "Vigilantes" do not attempt either of these difficult tasks.

In the present book there is room only for a series of flat statements of what we believe to be the relevant and decisive facts, without any room to explain why we hold that the facts we have selected are true, relevant, and of decisive importance in explaining what has happened.

As for impartiality, we are impartial in the sense that we respect facts, and do our best to be mentally honest. But we are "partial" in the sense that we know what we want. The study of the past, in our view, is important chiefly in so far as it helps us to understand what we ought to do in the present. Since the Great War, "Vigilantes" have never varied in their conviction that the survival of war is incompatible with the survival of civilisation—either war will destroy civilisation or civilisation must end war; that the only way to end war is to build up some form of world government; that the League of Nations is the first step in that direction and the starting-point for the further steps that will have to be taken; and that to give up the adventure of world government is to resign oneself to the inevitability of world war and to despair of civilisation. Therefore we

must make a new start with the League. But to make a new start successfully we must understand why the League has failed.

It is with this background and from this point of view that we have set forth as simply and clearly as we can what we believe has gone wrong, and what ought to be done, and by whom, to put things right.

"VIGILANTES"

CHAPTER I

WHY THERE WAS A WORLD WAR

IN THE LAST WORLD WAR both sides believed they were defending themselves, and both were wrong. Historians to this day cannot agree in fixing the exact degree of responsibility of the different Governments in the years that ended in 1914. But they do agree that all the warring Great Powers in Europe bore some degree of responsibility. Therefore both sides were more or less equally "aggressors" from an impartial, international point of view, although each country was, from its own self-righteous, national point of view, defending itself.

How was this paradox possible? How could both sides in the world war believe with equal sincerity and plausibility that they were defenders, while in fact being, in varying degree, aggressors? The answer is that the Great Powers were Imperialist, and were living in a state of international anarchy. Let us now see exactly what these phrases "international anarchy" and "Imperialism" mean.

"International anarchy" means that there is no

world law or authority which can impose rules of conduct in the relations between States. Each State is a law unto itself, and entitled to do what it likes toward other States—except in so far as it is restrained by fear of provoking war if it offends or injures another State. In their relations to each other, Governments in a condition of international anarchy are not guided by ideas of right and wrong, but by calculations as to what they can "get away with." And, of course, they identify what is right with what they can "get away with." For each Government is responsible only for safeguarding the interests of its own State—it recognises no international duty or interest—and is sole judge of what these interests are, and what ought to be done to defend or promote them. "Right," then, becomes identical with self-interest.

In the conditions of international anarchy, therefore, the community of nations is a collection of completely selfish and completely lawless units. They may, if they choose, pay attention to a body of customary rules, known as international law, which have slowly grown up as a matter of convenience, as guides to conduct in the relations between States. They may, if they choose, accept mediation or conciliation by disinterested States, or even the verdict of an arbitral tribunal, in their disputes with each other. This often happened on matters of minor importance. Still more often disputes were settled by negotiation and diplomacy, which meant by a process of bargaining. But it was part of the tradition of international anarchy that States refused to accept arbitration—that is, a binding award rendered by a group of judges on the basis of law—in matters which concerned their "honour and vital interests." And each Government decided for itself what it meant by "honour and vital interests."

Therefore, in the conditions of international anarchy

all really serious disputes were dealt with, not on the basis of law, but by bargaining. When outside States took a hand in trying to fix up some sort of deal or compromise between the disputants, the process of bargaining was called "mediation." When some board or committee took on the job, it was called "conciliation." When the parties dealt directly with each other, their bargaining was called "negotiation" or "diplomacy" (generally with some reference to "exploring every avenue" and "leaving no stone unturned").

Now it is obvious that, when people bargain who are completely selfish and lawless in their relations to each other, and believe it is their duty to be so (for each Government believes that its whole and sole duty is to preserve its own national interests, for which it is a trustee; it does not acknowledge the existence of any other moral, political, or legal obligation), their bargaining is apt to become "tough." Negotiations between Governments living in international anarchy are comparable to the relations between rival horse-thieves and gangsters rather than to those of civilised human beings in a community bound by law. Unlimited fraud may be used in these bargains—and backed up by unlimited force.

In international anarchy the final appeal is not to law, but to force. Governments arm in order to be able to "defend" their view of their national rights and interests against any challenge to that view. In this way war becomes an instrument of national policy, for "defence" means using force to back your country's policy against the policies of other countries. That is why in international anarchy there is often no difference between aggression and defence. In the case of a strong Power seeking to impose its policy upon a weak, the difference may be clear enough. But in clashes of policy between rival Great Powers it is generally impossible to

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consider one side "aggressors" and the other "defenders."

All this was so well recognised before the war that a whole set of phrases had been coined to express the relation of war to international anarchy. Thus Louis XIV of France carved on his cannon, "Ultima ratio regum," which is Latin for "The final argument of Kings." A German military writer—Clausewitz—coined the famous definition of war as "policy continued by other means." The equally famous phrase, "power politics," expresses the inseparable connection, in international anarchy, between defence and foreign policy, for "defence" simply means force with which to back the Government's policy in its dealings with other States.

As a natural and inevitable result of international anarchy and power politics, every Government wanted to have just a little more force at its disposal than any possible rival, so as to be able always to refuse to back down in its disputes, and, on the contrary, to compel the other fellow to give in and to accept our point of view on the matter at issue. Hence the arms race and the search for allies, so as to enable each State to be in a stronger position than possible opponents.

In spite of international anarchy, power politics, and the consequent race in arms, it is possible that States might have gone on indefinitely preferring bargains ending in compromises to the risk of a diplomatic dead-lock ending in the horrors of a world war. But at this point a new factor comes in—Imperialism. It was Imperialism that ultimately made the world war inevitable. What is Imperialism?

Imperialism may be described as the result of the economic development of capitalism in the political conditions created by international anarchy—that is, by lawlessness in the relations between States, by the absence of any form of world government. But this division

between " economic " and " political " is artificial. For capitalism as an economic system has been associated with the sovereign State as a political system from its birth until to-day. Economic anarchy within States has always been associated with political or international anarchy between States.

The rise of the middle class, and with it of capitalism, was an immense step forward in civilisation. But part of the price paid for the defeat of feudalism was the break-up of the mediæval unity of Christendom and the disappearance of the mediæval ideal of universality and world order. With capitalism came nationalism and the sovereign State.

In the first two-thirds of last century there were many who believed that free trade and investment would bind together the nations of the world and lay the foundations for world peace. In those days business enterprises were small-scale and independent, and the trader and manufacturer were dominant. The middle class was democratic and radical in outlook, felt hostility to the land-owning aristocracy and solidarity with middle-class revolutionary movements everywhere, and believed in free competition and keeping the State out of economic life.

But in the last third of the last century capitalism entered a new phase. Large-scale combines, cartels, and trusts sprang up that linked up with huge banking and investment concerns. This was " monopoly " or " finance " capitalism, in which the banker was master of the trader and manufacturer, and the big combine was crowding out or swallowing up the small " independent " enterprises. The middle class became bigger and more variegated, and its upper layer—the big business man and the banker—began to fuse with the old land-owning aristocracy into a new upper class—the plutocracy. The latter became Conservative in its politics, and began to use its influence on political

parties and Governments to "work" the power of the State for its own ends. This pressure of plutocracy on Governments took three main forms:

(*a*) Imperialism—the scramble for colonies, concessions, and markets where political sovereignty meant a differential advantage for the traders, manufacturers, and bankers of the country concerned, and where higher profits could be earned and competition was less severely felt than in the home markets and in "developed" countries generally. In the last third of last century nearly one half the population of the world was "colonised" by a handful of capitalist Powers.

(*b*) Armaments—the vast and uninterrupted growth of armaments before the war was due partly to the needs of Imperial "defence." That is, Governments wanted arms, not only to conquer and hold down native territories, but still more to threaten and bluff each other in the game of power politics that revolved about the colonial scramble. The "political" motive for the arms race was, therefore, indirectly due to the influence of the plutocracy in promoting the colonial scramble. But partly, too, the arms race was due to the direct pressure of the plutocracy on the Governments. The arms manufacturers in particular formed international rings to raise prices, foment war scares, bribe and bully Governments and civil servants, buy newspapers, make propaganda, etc., etc. Vol. I of Mr. P. J. Noel Baker's *The Private Manufacture of Armaments* gives details of how much the arms race before the war (and since) has been, and still is, due to the activities of private profit-making interests. For the arms manufacturers are bound by ties of class solidarity and business interest alike with the rest of the plutocracy, and particularly with the vested interests in Imperialism.

(*c*) Protectionism—the plutocracy pushing Governments into tariffs, quotas, subsidies, and other forms of

trade restrictions in order to give their vested interests as big an advantage as possible in their home and colonial markets over foreign competitors.

These were the influences that dominated capitalist politics before the war. Whereas it would be difficult to preserve peace in the conditions of international anarchy and power politics, even if Governments were masters in their own houses, it became an impossibility when Governments were little more than the puppets of blind, selfish, lawless, and utterly irresponsible forces.

For the sake of profits the arms race was pushed beyond even the needs of power politics; international crises about concessions and colonies were brought on by the greed of competing capitalist interests; public opinion was poisoned with fear and suspicion by the propaganda of the arms manufacturers and the other vested interests in Imperialism and war preparations. The wonder is not that the war came, but that it did not break out much sooner.

British statesmen and British arms manufacturers played a decisive part in making the world war inevitable, although they did so unwittingly and although they were no worse than the statesmen and arms manufacturers of other countries.

It was in this country that the middle class first completed the defeat of feudalism and first applied the ideas of Liberalism. At home this meant unparalleled prosperity and progress—and also the horrors of the Industrial Revolution and the beginning of the long struggle of the proletariat, through Chartism and the trade unions, for social emancipation. Abroad it meant that this country was first in the Imperialist scramble for colonies and concessions, and was in such a position of predominant power that it could indulge in "splendid isolation."

The traditional British policy was the Balance of

Power. This meant that we supported the next strongest Power on the Continent against the strongest. It also meant that Great Britain wanted the Lowlands (Holland and Belgium) and the French Channel ports in the hands of Powers too weak and too dependent on us ever to be a serious danger. That was why we undertook, with France, Austria, Russia, and Prussia, to respect the neutrality of Belgium in the treaties of 1831 and 1839. That was why, in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the British Government extracted assurances from both sides that they would respect the neutrality of Belgium, and then left them to fight it out. By 1887 colonial rivalry with France led to British official opinion, as expressed in the *Standard* and *Pall Mall Gazette* of February 4th, 1887, and the *Spectator* of February 5th, interpreting the 1831 and 1839 treaties as not pledging Great Britain to do anything in particular in case Germany were to go to war with France through Belgium—provided only Belgium's independence was restored after the war.

By the time of the purely Imperialist Boer War, Germany had grown so strong and was so unfriendly that the British Government became alarmed. It was clear that the unification and industrialisation of Germany, the rise of Italy, the Franco-Russian Alliance, and the possible drawing together of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy were making "splendid isolation" too dangerous. We had lost our industrial head start, and we must now choose with which group of Powers we would join forces, for fear, if we remained aloof, that they might all combine to despoil the British Empire.

After toying with the idea of an Anglo-German alliance, Great Britain chose France. A crisis, where British and French colonial troops nearly clashed at Fashoda about rival claims to the Sudan, led to a diplomatic bargain, or "deal," on a big scale, in which France acknowledged our "rights" in Egypt (from

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which we had promised to withdraw, and whose independence we had sworn to respect), in exchange for the British Government concluding a secret treaty providing for the conquest by France of Morocco. This was accompanied by a public treaty in which both France and Great Britain guaranteed the independence and integrity of Morocco. The interests of finance capital played a decisive part in the conclusion of this deal in 1904.

In 1905–7 came the Russo-Japanese War and the first Russian Revolution. This might have succeeded if money had not been lent to the Tsar by the City of London, which enabled him to carry out a counter-revolution. This was done in the teeth of a flaming protest by the first Russian Duma (Parliament), which had been dissolved by the Tsar and then met unofficially at Viborg, in Finland. This transaction was sanctioned by the Liberal Government of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, in spite of the latter's famous speech of welcome to Russian democracy, battling for its life against the Tsardom, that ended, " The Duma is dead—long live the Duma ! " The difference between what Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman said and what the Liberal Government did was due to the fact that the latter, which came in in 1906, simply continued the foreign policy of its Tory predecessors. The fusion of the upper ranks of the new middle class with the old land-owning aristocracy had created a plutocracy that dominated both the Conservative and Liberal Parties, and made them more and more alike on the issues of Imperialism and foreign policy.

The Russian Tsar was lent money to put down the first revolution (which, if it had succeeded, would almost certainly have led in a few years to the democratisation of Germany, and so would have prevented the world war), because the British Liberal Government wanted

the Tsardom as an ally against Germany in the Balance of Power it was building up. The agreement to this effect was concluded in 1907, and involved an Anglo-Russian secret deal to promote the interests of capitalist groups by carving up Persia, the northern half becoming a Russian sphere of influence, the southern a British. This was accompanied, as usual, by public protestations of friendship for Persia and pledges to respect her independence and territorial integrity.

Next, British policy, while preparing for war both by an arms race and by building up alliances, did its best to come to terms with Germany by the usual process of bargaining backed by threats (or, rather, by the suave intimation, conveyed with exquisite delicacy, that force lurked in the background in case the deal did not come off). Some successes were gained. An agreement was reached, at the expense of Turkey, for the building by Germany of the Berlin–Baghdad railway, with the usual "perks" and concessions. Another agreement provided for the handing over of Portugal's colonies to Germany.

But the policy of a deal with Germany failed. It did so largely because it was based on the principle that any concession made must be at someone else's expense; it must leave British Imperial possessions untouched and the ratio of British and German power unaltered. And, of course, because it was a single-handed deal, it could not solve Franco-German and Russo-German problems, although we could not be indifferent to these problems because of the Balance of Power.

On the other hand, the relations of this country with France and Russia were so loose and ambiguous that they encouraged Germany to speculate on our remaining neutral if she went to war against these States. This ambiguity was maintained up to the moment war broke out, and justified as follows by Lord (then Mr.) Asquith, the Prime Minister, on July 31st, i.e. twenty-four hours

before Germany entered Belgium and three days before this country declared war on Germany: "All turns on what England may do, and the object of our Foreign Office at present is to keep Europe in suspense on that point. So long as Europe does not know what England is likely to do, there is a great steadying influence upon both France and Russia, for they both feel that Germany might be difficult to tackle unless the other Powers had us supporting them. Germany in the meantime shrinks from aggressive action—e.g. through Belgium—because it does not know whether we should vehemently oppose; and, if we did, their task would be doubled in difficulty. Hence the expediency of our not saying at present what we shall or will not do" (quoted by Lord Rankeillour in the Upper House on November 19th, 1936).

This justification, it will be seen, rests on the belief that the British Government can trust itself with a free hand but cannot trust any other State to keep its obligations. Ambiguity about our commitments was not, however, only due to self-righteousness in foreign policy. It also corresponded to the need in home policy to mislead the British people. For British public opinion was at that time strongly isolationist, and would have strenuously objected to the various secret deals and commitments of the Liberal Government—if it had known they existed. But it was not allowed to know. On the rare occasions when it showed any interest—there were only two debates in the House on foreign policy in the three years before the war—it was deliberately misled by Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Asquith. Because, as Bertrand Russell has remarked, "Grey was a high-minded man, a sincere patriot, a perfectly honourable gentleman in his dealings with those whom he regarded as equals," but "his belief in honourable dealing did not extend to the House of Commons, since he held the aristocratic opinion that ordinary mortals could not understand foreign

politics" (*Freedom and Organisation*, 1814–1914, pp. 501–2).

And so the Balance of Power teetered precariously in Europe, sustained by the two rival alliances, with Great Britain trying to make the best of both worlds (isolation and alliances) in one of them. In course of time, as the American historian, Professor B. Sydney Faye, has pointed out, "both the Franco-Russian and the Triple Alliance were transformed in character in the years before the world war from originally defensive into potentially offensive alliances—that is, any member of either alliance could pursue an aggressive policy and feel pretty sure that, if this goaded a Great Power into an attack upon it, it could count on the armed support of its allies."

Great Britain was not physically strong enough to stand aloof from both camps, nor politically wise and morally generous enough to bring them together on the basis of some general settlement. This, indeed, was not possible except by an approach to social justice and world government by the leading Powers that was literally "unthinkable" in those days.

Coming in openly on the side of France and Russia might have given us an influence that could have preserved peace until internal changes had brought about the long-postponed democratisation of Germany and Russia. But this policy would have required a big and rapid change in British public opinion.

The course actually followed was a sort of in-and-out semi-isolation tempered by bargaining for "deals" that kept our potential allies and enemies guessing and public opinion fooled, and that failed both as a deterrent against war and as a method of making peace through conciliation.

The Anglo-German trade rivalry, Germany's desire for colonies, and the French grievance over Alsace-

Lorraine, were the chief West European sources of friction, and largely capitalist-Imperialist in character.[1] Austro-German Imperialist rivalry with Russia in the Balkans and Near East was the Eastern source.

The biggest general source of friction was the arms race. In 1912 Lord (then Sir Edward) Grey insisted that the arms race must be stopped or it would end in war or revolution. In his book *Twenty-Five Years* (Vol. I, pp. 91–2) he writes: "The moral is obvious; it is that great armaments lead inevitably to war. If there are armaments on one side, there must be armaments on the other sides. . . . The increase of armaments that is intended in each nation to produce consciousness of strength, and a sense of security, does not produce these effects. On the contrary, it produces a consciousness of the strength of other nations and a sense of fear. Fear begets suspicion and distrust and evil imaginings of all sorts. . . . The enormous growth of armaments in Europe, the sense of insecurity and fear caused by them—it was these that made war inevitable. This, it seems to me, is the truest reading of history, and the lesson that the present should be learning from the past in the interests of future peace, the warning to be handed on to those who come after us."

But armaments do not grow of themselves. Mr. P. J. Noel Baker, in his standard book on *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, shows in detail, with an overwhelming wealth of evidence, how the arms manufacturers in this country and the Continent wrecked all attempts to end Anglo-German naval rivalry by agreement, and stimulated the arms race. He also shows how the arms

[1] There was of course a purely "Nationalist" aspect to the Alsace-Lorraine question. But it was Lorraine iron ore that led German big business to insist on the annexation of these French provinces after the war of 1870, and it was chiefly French plutocracy and reaction that kept the grievance alive in France until 1914—also largely because of the iron ore.

industry is linked up with the rest of capitalist industry and finance, and with the policies of Imperialism.

The Governments playing the game of power politics were little more than puppets in the hands of forces that were not so much evil as blind and irresponsible, and always, in the pursuit of profit, pushing them into clashes of Imperialist policies and more and more fevered war preparations. And so the Governments drifted, or, as Mr. Lloyd George has said, " glided, or rather staggered and stumbled," into the war without quite knowing what they were doing, and certainly without willing the awful catastrophe that overtook humanity.

The most horrifying thing about the world war was not the material destruction and waste of human life so much as the aimless foolishness, the sordid silliness, the sheer meaninglessness of those four years of butchery.

The utter failure of British foreign policy and of the British governing class to avert this calamity, or to make anything of it after it had befallen us, is summed up in Sir Edward Grey's remark that " I used to hope that I was meant to keep the country out of war. But perhaps my real business was to bring her into it unitedly " (quoted by Mr. G. M. Trevelyan in his *Lord Grey of Fallodon*).

In a series of crises, first the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy; Italy in the first year of the war " double-crossed " the Central Powers and was bought over by the Allies) threatened war and the Triple Entente (France, Great Britain, and Russia) yielded; then the Triple Entente threatened war and the Triple Alliance yielded. Finally, in 1914, neither side would yield, and the long-prepared war began. The row started with the murder of the Austrian Archduke in Serajevo by assassins connected with " official circles " in Serbia. A drastic Austrian ultimatum to Serbia was only partly accepted. Russia (as the protector of Serbia) and Austria

both began mobilising. The Russian partial mobilisation was converted into a general mobilisation by the Chief of Staff without the knowledge of the Tsar. Then Germany began to mobilise. The war machines were all ready to start at the touch of a button, and all trying to force their Governments' hands to press the button. Once they had started, they were automatic—they could not be stopped. But there was no peace machinery at all. All attempts, in which the British Government were particularly active, to bring the two sides together in conference broke down.

Germany offered to respect the neutrality of Belgium if we kept out of the war. In the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, when we were strong enough to maintain "splendid isolation" and did not care which side won, that had been our policy. In 1887, when the Government were rather hostile to France, they were prepared to tolerate even a German march through Belgium, in case of war, if Germany promised to restore the country's independence afterwards. But since then we had come down on the side of France in the Balance of Power. For years British, French, and Belgian mobilisation plans had been based on joint action to repel a German invasion of Belgium. Therefore the British Government refused Germany's offer, and made a bull point in its propaganda of the German Chancellor's statement that "after all, treaties are only scraps of paper." But Sir Arnold Wilson was right when he said, in the course of a tribute in the House on February 24th, 1936, to Lord Grey as Foreign Secretary that he would "go down in history as a man who was the foremost in keeping the bond of this country when he thought that the interests of the country required it." In 1914 Great Britain declared war on Germany because of the Balance of Power and Imperialism, not because of Belgium.

CHAPTER II

HOW THE WAR ENDED

THE GOVERNMENTS that drifted into the war because they could not resist the blind forces that drove them into Imperialism and war preparations were utterly incapable of stopping the war they had started. They could organise the slaughter, but the very vastness and horror of the conflict made them helpless to end it. The forces of destruction, hatred, and fear released by the war were so huge and so appallingly savage that reason and mercy, and with them any hope of a settlement by compromise or agreement, were banished. It soon became evident that the war would rage on until one side collapsed from sheer exhaustion, or until the universal famine, that by 1917 was a serious threat in all belligerent countries, compelled a cessation of hostilities.

On the political side, the Liberal Government in this country speedily became a " National " coalition, which in turn was soon dominated by the Conservative Party and the most bellicose and Imperialistic of the Liberals. " The knock-out blow," and a military victory as the preliminary to a dictated peace, soon became the official policy. Any suggestion of a negotiated peace, without victors or vanquished, was branded as " pro-German " and " treason." Similar developments occurred in France and Germany.

On the military side the war machines—that is, the War Offices and Admiralties—soon got the whip hand of the civilian Governments and were virtually in control of the belligerent countries. Mr. Lloyd George has revealed in Vol. V of his memoirs how certain General

Staff officers plotted to impose a military dictatorship on this country, and came within an ace of success.

War conditions led to intimate relations between Governments and the plutocracy—that is, big business and the bankers. This meant that there was a vast amount of war-profiteering that Governments neither would nor could stop. It meant that labour was conscripted, both industrially and militarily, trade unions were fettered, and strikes in war industries became treasonable. It also meant the Governments committing themselves to Imperialist war aims under the pressure of the plutocracy, as well as for strategic reasons and in order to bribe each other to go on with the war.

The German war aims provided for territorial expansion in Europe, for more colonies, for one-sided commercial treaties and one-sided disarmament, and for a war indemnity. On the side of the Allies, war aims took the form of the secret treaties, which provided for the dividing up and annexation of practically the whole of Persia and Turkey; the seizure of all Germany's colonies; the annexation by Russia of parts of East Germany and of the Austrian Empire and Russian hegemony in South-East Europe and the Balkans; the detachment of the Rhineland from Germany; Italy was to have large slices of Austria-Hungary and was virtually invited to help herself to Abyssinia. A huge indemnity, unilateral disarmament, one-sided commercial treaties, and the taking over of the German navy and merchant fleet were to complete the job.

At the same time public opinion had to be induced, by censorship of news and views and by war propaganda, to believe in the virtue and necessity of fighting to a finish, and had to be kept in ignorance of what the Governments intended the finish to be like. In this country the Government's war propaganda was in the hands of Lord Northcliffe, who later died insane. Second

only to him in influence on public opinion was Mr. Horatio Bottomley, who later "did" seven years for fraud. In all the belligerent countries crooks and madmen rose into power in the congenial atmosphere of the war and proceeded to poison public opinion.

The process of creating "war-mindedness" was necessary in order to win the war. But it reduced the belligerent peoples to a state of mind where they were incapable of making a decent peace. This fact is vividly brought out in the following quotation from Ray Stannard Baker's *Woodrow Wilson and World Settlement.* Replying to those who objected to the harshness of the Versailles Treaty, Mr. Baker writes: "Critics after the event forget that peace had to be made in an atmosphere still reeking with the fumes of war and still more or less dominated by the military spirit. It could not have been otherwise. For four years the nations had been committed to the use of every agency in building up a war psychology; to giving men the martial spirit, instilling hatred as an antidote for fear, driving nations into an artificial unity of purpose by the force of sheer necessity. . . . Build up such a psychology for four years, inoculate the entire public opinion of the world with it, and then ask four men at Paris—or one man at Paris—to change it all in three months! It was not merely a world peace that had to be made, but a world psychology that had to be changed."

What did finally end the war was not the Governments but the uprising of the tortured peoples in revolution, first in Russia and then in Austria-Hungary and Germany. It was the working class that formed the vanguard of these revolutions, and Socialist Parties that gave them leadership. To understand how this came to pass it is necessary to glance at the history of the Labour and Socialist movement during the war.

Before the war the Labour and Socialist Parties, here

and on the Continent, were loosely united in the Second Internationale. In the decade before the world war the Internationale had pledged itself to joint action by all Socialist and Labour Parties to stop their Governments from going to war by war-resistance, including general strikes, in both would-be belligerent camps. The " horizontal " international class-solidarity of the proletariat was to resist the " vertical " national solidarity of patriotism. In the twelve days of feverish negotiations that ended in the world war, there was some talk of mobilising the proletariat through the Internationale. Jaurès, the French Socialist leader, was shot by a patriotic assassin for speaking against the war.

But, instead, the workers were mobilised for war by their respective Governments. In Russia most of the Socialist leaders decided, that since their country was the ally of the Western democracies against semi-autocratic Germany and Austria-Hungary, they should support the war, in the belief that victory would bring the democratisation of the Tsardom. In Germany and Austria-Hungary the Social-Democratic leadership decided to support the war because their countries were more democratic and civilised than the Russian Tsardom. In Great Britain and France the great majority of the Labour and Socialist movements decided that the war must be supported because it was a war to end war and to rescue small nations from Imperialist Great Powers, as well as an ideological conflict between democracy and militarism.

Nevertheless, minorities in the Labour and Socialist movements in all countries were opposed to the war all through, and the pro-war majorities were steadily in favour of moderate peace terms and of a League of Nations. Abortive attempts were made, at the Zimmerwald and Kienthal Conferences, to restore international working-class unity in striving for peace. In this country

it was the pioneer work of extreme "Left" bodies like the Union of Democratic Control and the Fabian Society, and the writings of Socialists and Radicals such as E. D. Morel, Bertrand Russell, G. Lowes Dickinson, Leonard Woolf, H. N. Brailsford, and Norman Angell, that gave much of the intellectual stimulus to the movement for a League of Nations. The Labour and Socialist movement gave it most of its initial political support.

The Governments and the plutocracy, while on the one hand committing themselves in secret to war aims that made a decent peace impossible, were obliged on the other to play up to the idealism of the masses and of the poor devils who were getting themselves killed, by taking up the idea of a League of Nations and making much of the "ideological conflict" between democracy and militarism.

This was the situation until the outbreak of the Russian Revolution. The Revolution, as President Wilson later declared, made it easier for the U.S.A. to enter the war. The entry of the U.S.A. and the Russian Revolution between them gave more substance to the propaganda about the war being an ideological conflict between democracy and militarism. The first Russian Revolution issued appeals for peace "without annexations or indemnities," and asked for the abortive Stockholm Conference of Socialist Parties from both belligerent camps to frame a working-class peace settlement. The Allied Governments refused permission to their Socialists to attend the Stockholm Conference. They pretended to accept the formula, "No annexations or indemnities," just as they later pretended to accept Wilson's fourteen points. But they explained they must have "guarantees" and "reparations"—i.e. annexations and indemnities under a different name. They backed counter-revolutionary movements in Russia (e.g. General Korniloff), and compelled the Kerenski

Labour had welcomed when President Wilson gave them expression " (pp. 207 and 209).

British Labour, indeed, for the whole of the last year of the war, and as a direct result of the Russian Revolution, was against the continuation of the war, and for a negotiated, " stalemate " peace, without victors or vanquished, and without annexations or indemnities.

Exactly the same development occurred in France, where, says Temperley, " A division of opinion eventually developed which was partly due to the sufferings of the working classes in the war, but partly to suspicions of the motives of the various Governments which succeeded one another without perceptibly bringing nearer the possibility of peace. . . . Suspicions began to be aroused that the purposes of the Allies in the war were not what they had been, or, at least, not what they were generally believed to have been at the beginning " (p. 210).

As for Italy: " At the close of the war nearly the whole of organised Labour in Italy was not only in opposition to their own Government, but dissociated from the Socialist and Labour Parties of other Allied countries and looking to Moscow and the Third Internationale " (p. 212).

In Germany and Austria-Hungary matters went still further: " The actual position of the German Labour organisations at the Armistice was perhaps one of the chief causes of the entire destruction of all German power. . . . The final overthrow of the military power was in great part due to the distrust shown by German Labour organisations " (p. 213).

" By the autumn of 1917," concludes Temperley, " in all belligerent countries organised Labour was inclined to feel that the Governments could do nothing, and that Labour itself must make the first move towards peace " (p. 216).

The Allied Governments reacted to Labour's growing

distrust in several ways. They endeavoured to bamboozle the Russian Revolution into acquiescing in their Imperialist war aims and continuing the war. When this did not succeed, they attempted to destroy the revolution, and instead succeeded only in destroying the Kerenski Government and helping the Bolsheviks into power. Afterwards they attempted to destroy the Soviet Government by intervention. But this was mostly during and after the Peace Conference. Before the Conference they endeavoured to allay the suspicions of public opinion in general and of Labour in particular by nominally adopting President Wilson's fourteen points as the basis of the peace settlement.

But the Allied Governments did not relinquish their secret treaties. The German people revolted against their rulers, adopted a democratic constitution, and agreed to an armistice and to peace terms based on Wilson's fourteen points. The Allied Governments then disarmed Germany and afterwards broke their promise. They treated democratic Germany as harshly as they would have treated militarist Germany. They endeavoured to dictate a peace which merely couched the Imperialist war aims of the secret treaties in the language of Wilson's fourteen points.

But the Soviet Government had repudiated the secret treaties. Without Russian assistance it was militarily impossible to impose some of the secret treaty terms in East Europe and the Near East, and politically difficult to " put them over " at the Peace Conference.

The Russian Revolution, therefore, not only hastened the end of the war and increased the pressure of the working class and of all progressive opinion on the peace-makers, but strengthened the hands of Wilson and of the more " liberal " wing of the British delegation at Paris in resisting even harsher terms than those imposed at Versailles and in insisting that the League of Nations

and the International Labour Organisation should be an integral part of the peace treaties and automatically come into being when they came into force. The Paris peace settlement was bad enough. But it would have been infinitely worse if not for the influence of the Russian Revolution.

A counter-revolutionary, Fascist Russia would have dominated the whole of East Europe and the Near East, and would have aided the British and French Governments to put through all their Imperialist war aims and to postpone the framing of the Covenant (as they frequently tried to do) until after the Peace Conference. That would have meant the League never coming into existence at all, and that Europe would have gone mostly Fascist after the first post-war slump, instead of waiting until the great slump and then offsetting Fascism in Central and Southern Europe by the success of the Soviet Union in the east and the survival of democracy in the west and north.

As it was, the Allied Governments tried, and failed, through two years of intervention in Russia (a war quite as cruel as what Germany and Italy have done in Spain), to help what we should now call Russian Fascism to defeat the revolution. They successfully "half-intervened" in Germany and Austria-Hungary, by the threat of renewing the "hunger blockade," to prevent any social revolution and to undo such social revolutions as had occurred (e.g. in Hungary).

In short, the Governments and ruling classes that were pushed into the war by blind capitalist forces became the puppets of capitalist reaction and greed, and were prevented from wholly destroying civilisation only by working-class revolutions in some countries and revolutionary unrest in others. That is the lesson of the last world war.

CHAPTER III

THE LEAGUE UNTIL THE GREAT SLUMP

IT WAS THANKS to the pertinacity of President Wilson, seconded by the "liberals," in the broad sense of progressive capitalists (men like Viscount Cecil and General Smuts), in the British delegation at the Peace Conference that the League of Nations became part of the peace settlement. Wilson's chief antagonist was the French Premier, Clemenceau. The "Old Tiger," as he was fittingly known, believed in nothing but power politics and Imperialism, and said so with refreshing frankness. He poked fun at Wilson's fourteen points, which were supposed to be the basis of the peace settlement and the charter of a new world order, saying, "The good God had only Ten Commandments, but President Wilson has brought over Fourteen." He used to tell Wilson, "I like your League of Nations; I like it very much; but I don't believe in it."

Clemenceau's attitude represented Conservatism, plutocracy, and the old diplomacy in Great Britain and the U.S.A. as well as in France. It had powerful support in the passions of hatred and fear aroused by the war and exacerbated by war propaganda. That was not an opposition that could be overcome by sweet reason or appeals to respect for promises. On what forces did the liberals at the Peace Conference rely to overcome the hostility of all that Clemenceau represented to the very idea of a League of Nations?

The usual answer is the universal and passionate longing for peace. But this is only part of the truth. The longing for peace is politically so shapeless and vague

that it can be manipulated into supporting almost anything, even an arms race or a Fascist foreign policy. Those who at the time of the Peace Conference wanted the unilateral disarmament and dismemberment of the Central Powers, in order to make it physically impossible for them to go to war again, desired peace just as earnestly as those who took longer views.

A more potent, because less "manageable," force than the longing for peace, was the revolutionary discontent of the working class. Those elements of the working class that were not openly revolutionary at the end of the war were making sweeping demands, crystallised in the ideas of a League of Nations and of an International Labour Organisation, for a new world order that would prevent a recurrence of war and give the workers social justice. The strongest argument of the liberals at the Peace Conference in extracting concessions from Conservatism and plutocracy was the necessity for paying heed to the political demands of the workers.

All accounts of the Peace Conference agree on how the fear of social revolution haunted the peacemakers, and how the League and the I.L.O. were looked upon as concessions necessary to avert big trouble from the workers. "The poison of Bolshevism is being absorbed as a protest against the way the world has worked," said President Wilson on board the *George Washington* on his way to the Peace Conference. "It will be our business at the Peace Conference to fight for a new order. That order must be based upon, and guaranteed by, a League of Nations."

Colonel House, President Wilson's chief adviser, wrote in his diary at the Peace Conference, on March 22nd, 1919: "The peoples want peace. Bolshevism is striking root everywhere. Hungary has just succumbed. We are sitting on a powder barrel that may at any moment be exploded by a spark." He, too, drew the conclusion that

a new order based on a League of Nations was the only possible alternative to the break-up of the old order in social revolution.

Ray Stannard Baker, in the book already quoted, writes: "The spectre of revolution haunted the Peace Conference like a nightmare. One remembers vividly how the councils at Paris were given no rest, day or night, from hearing the woes of the world; how they were constantly agitated by cries of hunger from without . . . or alarmed by the voices of new wars . . . or distracted by the fierce uprisings of peoples. . . . And at all times, at every turn of the negotiations, there rose the spectre of chaos, like a black cloud out of the east, threatening to overwhelm and swallow up the world. There was no Russia knocking at the gates of Vienna! At Vienna, apparently, the revolution was securely behind them; at Paris it was always with them."

This comparison between the Vienna Peace Congress a century ago, when Napoleon, and apparently with him the French Revolution, had been safely defeated, and the Paris Peace Conference, where social revolution had triumphed in Russia and was raising its head everywhere, was also made by Mr. Lloyd George. In his confidential memorandum to the Big Four at the Peace Conference, entitled *Some Considerations for the Peace Conference before they Finally Draft their Terms*, he wrote: "There is one element in the present condition of nations which differentiates it from the situation as it was in 1815. In the Napoleonic war the countries were equally exhausted, but the revolutionary spirit had exhausted itself in the country of its birth. . . . The situation is very different now. The revolution is still in its infancy. The extreme figures of the Terror are still in command in Russia. The whole of Europe is filled with the spirit of Revolution. There is a deep sense not only of discontent, but of anger and revolt, amongst the

workmen against pre-war conditions. The whole existing order in its political, social, and economic aspects is questioned by the masses of the population, from one end of Europe to the other. In some countries, like Germany and Russia, the unrest takes the form of open rebellion; in others, like France, Great Britain, and Italy, it takes the shape of strikes and of general disinclination to settle down to work, symptoms which are just as much concerned with the desire for political and social change as with wage demands.

"Much of the unrest is healthy. We shall never make a lasting peace by attempting to restore the conditions of 1914. But there is a danger that we may throw the masses of the population throughout Europe into the arms of extremists whose only idea for regenerating mankind is to destroy utterly the whole existing fabric of society."

Mr. Lloyd George said he was particularly afraid of social revolution in Germany, for then all Europe would go Bolshevik and join up with the Russians. Therefore the peace terms must be made such that the German Government could accept them and could carry them out (and, he hinted, there must be intervention in Russia).

"It is not, however, enough to draw up a just and far-sighted peace with Germany. If we are to offer Europe an alternative to Bolshevism we must make the League of Nations into something which will be both a safeguard to those nations who are prepared for fair dealing with their neighbours, and a menace to those who would trespass on the rights of their neighbours, whether they are Imperialist empires or Imperialist Bolshevists. An essential element, therefore, in the peace settlement is the constitution of the League of Nations as the effective guardian of international right and international liberty throughout the world. . . . It is essential that the leading

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members of the League should . . . present a united front to the forces both of reaction and revolution."

General Smuts concluded his famous Peace Conference pamphlet, *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion*, which had such an influence on President Wilson, as follows: "The League of Nations . . . must be the wise regulator, the steadying influence in the forward movement now set going among the nations of the earth.

"For there is no doubt that mankind is once more on the move. The very foundations have been shakened and loosened, and things are again fluid. The tents have been struck, and the great caravan of humanity is once more on the march. Vast social and industrial changes are coming—perhaps upheavals which may, in their magnitude and effects, be comparable to war itself. A steadying, controlling, regulative influence will be required to give stability to progress, and to remove that wasteful friction which has dissipated so much social force in the past, and in this war more than ever before. These great functions could only be adequately fulfilled by the League of Nations." The League, concluded General Smuts, should become "the great Internationale" for the workers of the world.

The founding of the International Labour Organisation was, if possible, even more strongly influenced by the desire of the Governments to give the workers concessions and assurances that would avert the danger of revolution. The constitution of the I.L.O. begins by saying that it was founded because "the League of Nations has for its object the establishment of universal peace, and such a peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice," whereas "conditions of labour exist involving such injustice, hardship, and privation to large numbers of people as to produce unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world

are imperilled, and an improvement of those conditions is urgently required."

The I.L.O. was founded not only in response to the direct demand of organised Labour, but on the basis of plans submitted by Labour, and in co-operation with some individual Labour leaders, such as Mr. Barnes of Great Britain. The spirit in which the Governments and diplomats regarded the business is described in the following passage from Temperley's *History of the Peace Conference of Paris:* "When at the first plenary session of the Peace Conference Clemenceau announced that one of the three first commissions to be appointed was to deal with International Labour legislation, the general opinion seemed to be that this action was to be explained as a counter move to the Labour conventions of the Socialists and trade unionists, which were at that moment threatening to throw the whole weight of the international labour movement in opposition to the work of the Paris Peace Conference." This interpretation "implied a certain unreality in the work of the Commission" and a "spirit of temporising expediency." Nevertheless, "the taint of a suspicion that this was the case lingered all through the Peace Conference, and a certain indifference towards its work was noticeable upon the part of those occupied with the more normal labours of treaty-making, in the preparation of maps for new boundaries, and statistics for indemnities. It is possible, however, that the Labour section of the Treaty, in spite of the relatively unfavourable circumstances under which it was prepared, may prove of as definite and lasting significance as the political and economic sections. There was, indeed, a grotesque side to the work of those exact scientists, the geographers, mapping the frontiers of a new Europe that was in the midst of an eruption, with the molten currents of revolution sweeping away all old-time barriers in both the political and

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the economic realm. Whatever could be done by the Labour section to stem this international revolutionary current by way of positive promises for the future, if not through achievement at the moment, was as effective a stabilising action as the tracing of frontiers on the illusive, blood-stained map of Europe " (Vol. II, p. 32).

These official and semi-official quotations show clearly that the driving-force on which Peace Conference liberals chiefly relied to overcome conservative and plutocratic resistance to the League and the I.L.O. was the revolutionary discontent of the workers. They also show that the acceptance of the League and the I.L.O. was due to mixed motives, even among liberals. Some recognised that sweeping social changes and upheavals were bound to come and the old order was doomed. They honestly desired the League and the I.L.O. to become the medium, not for frustrating or side-tracking the forces of change, but for organising and directing them in ways that would make change come peaceably and progressively instead of blindly and destructively. These genuine liberals shaded off into " liberals " and conservatives who were chiefly anxious to stabilise the social *status quo* against the forces of change by inducing the workers to content themselves with " positive promises for the future," instead of insisting on " achievement at the moment."

But whereas Labour unrest and fear of the Russian Revolution played a big part in bringing the League into existence, the workers had little influence in determining the constitution of the League. That was chiefly the outcome of Anglo-American liberal drafting, and of a clash between Anglo-Saxon and Continental views.

The compromise that resolved this clash was based on leaving out the proposals on both sides that went furthest in infringing sovereignty and nationalist sentiment. How far that process went is clear from the following

semi-official statement, that was given out when the final text of the Covenant was first published in this country: "The document that has emerged from these [Peace Conference] discussions is not the Constitution of a Super-State, but, as its title explains, a solemn agreement between sovereign States, which consent to limit their complete freedom of action on certain points for the greater good of themselves and the world at large. Recognising that one generation cannot hope to bind its successor by written words, the [League of Nations] Commission has worked throughout on the assumption that the League must continue to depend on the free consent, in the last resort, of its component States; this assumption is evident in nearly every article of the Covenant, of which the ultimate and most effective sanction must be the public opinion of the civilised world. If the nations of the future are in the main selfish, grasping, and warlike, no instrument or machinery will restrain them. It is only possible to establish an organisation which may make peaceful co-operation easy and hence customary, and to trust in the influence of custom to mould opinion."

This was a far cry from General Smuts's bold statement in his Peace Conference pamphlet: "We want a League which will be real, practical, effective as a system of world government." The League as it emerged from the Paris Conference was indeed nothing but a loose association of sovereign States, bound to meet from time to time and at the request of either party to a dispute; to submit all disputes to some form of pacific procedure and to refrain from war for a time sufficient to give this procedure a chance and against a State accepting a peaceful award; to sever all relations with a State resorting to war in disregard of these obligations. In addition, there were undertakings to reduce and limit armaments by agreement, to co-operate in economic, technical, and

humanitarian matters, and to set up a Permanent Court of International Justice.

The main conference of the League was the Assembly, where all the Governments of the member States were represented on an equal footing. A smaller conference, in which the Great Powers in the League were permanently represented and the Assembly elected a contingent of smaller Powers from time to time, was known as the Council. The Assembly and Council were to have at their disposal a body of international civil servants known as the Secretariat.

The decisions of the League, except on matters of procedure, must be taken unanimously, including in most cases the parties to a dispute. In this loose association of States, therefore, there was no central authority which could take decisions on behalf of the Governments. It was the Governments themselves who decided what they wished to do. Everything depended on their good faith toward the treaty obligations they had assumed. The action of the League was always the outcome of the foreign policies of its member States. That meant in practice the outcome of Anglo-French co-operation, for France and Great Britain dominated League and world affairs until 1931.

At the outset of its career the League suffered several heavy blows. The first was the outcome of a direct conflict between the forces of Labour and plutocracy in which Labour was defeated. The defeat was probably due to the fact, as pointed out by Temperley in his *History*, that soon after the armistice Labour became so absorbed in domestic problems arising out of demobilisation and re-employment that its pressure on the Peace Conference began to relax. The Labour and Socialist Parties in the Allied countries had pressed on their Governments a demand that the inter-Allied economic and transport controls set up during the war should be

internationalised at the Peace Conference by the inclusion of neutrals and ex-enemies, put under the League, and used to guide the work of reconstruction during the transition from war to peace conditions. The Allied Governments took up this idea. It was flatly turned down by the U.S.A., under the pressure of American big business, appropriately represented by Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, himself a big business man and high priest of private enterprise, and energetically seconded by British and French big business. The plutocracy in all countries was in a hurry to get back to uncontrolled profit-making, and entirely indifferent to any social or political consequences. Sir Alfred Zimmern, in his *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law*, suggests that this was the League's greatest defeat, for "the economic forces were allowed to slip out of the control of statesmanship."

The second big blow was the withdrawal of the U.S.A. because of the Senate's refusal to ratify the Versailles Treaty. In addition, the peace settlement, although less evil than its critics have made out, thanks largely to the exposure and repudiation of the secret treaties by the Russian Revolution, was harsher and more unjust than the liberals at the Peace Conference had hoped. Allied intervention in Russia was followed by Polish aggression and the Greco-Turkish War. Unsettled boundary questions were settled by rough-and-ready methods, such as the Roumanian seizure of Bessarabia, the Polish seizure of East Galicia and Vilna, and the Italian occupation of Trieste. In the first post-war slump, Italy went Fascist and committed aggression against Greece at Corfu. A reactionary French Government invaded the Ruhr in Germany in order to try to exact reparations by force. The whole question of reparations and war debts was kept out of the League's purview, and handled by the Allies and the U.S.A. on lines that bedevilled world politics and economics.

Nevertheless, the weakened and mutilated League that was born into such a forbidding world lived and grew. For the first ten years of the League it looked as though the liberal faith in freedom and elasticity for development under the impulse of public opinion was going to be justified by works, and as though the three assumptions made by those who presided at the League's birth were going to come true.

The first assumption was that democracy would be the prevailing system of government within the League and in world affairs. It cannot be too much emphasised that the League was from the outset stated by all its founders, from President Wilson's fourteen points on, to be entirely dependent on the existence of democracy and the operation of a free public opinion in its member States. The League was intended to consecrate and consolidate the victory of democracy in its " ideological conflict " with militarism. It was believed by the liberals at the Peace Conference that, as General Smuts put it in his pamphlet, " The old institutions on which Imperialism and autocracy flourished lie crumbled in the dust; a great wave of advanced democracy is sweeping blindly over Europe."

The second assumption was that the League would shortly become universal. By 1929 the entry of Germany and the other ex-enemies, the growth of the League from forty-two to fifty odd States, the increasing co-operation with the U.S.A., and the beginning of co-operation with the U.S.S.R., made this assumption seem reasonable.

The third assumption was that armaments would be reduced and limited by international agreement. Here progress in the first ten years was indirect, but real. There was no renewal of the arms race, largely thanks to the growing confidence in the League. Lord Grey, the French Foreign Minister M. Briand, and the German

Chancellor Herr Stresemann, all declared that if the League had existed in 1914 there never would have been a world war. The chief naval armaments were partially limited in the Washington and London Conferences. The Permanent Court of Justice was set up and a number of States accepted compulsory arbitration. Lengthy discussions and various abortive treaties paved the way for the Preparatory Commission of a Disarmament Conference that was also to organise collective security against aggression.

These three assumptions were made explicitly, and over and over again, by the founders of the League. Up to the great slump, they appeared to be broadly justified. After the great slump it appears evident that they were all three based on a fourth assumption, which was not mentioned at the Peace Conference, because it was unconsciously taken for granted by liberals and conservatives alike. That assumption was that the economic system would continue to function after the war as it had done before, with private enterprise as its mainspring. So long as that tacit assumption held good, the three explicit assumptions were valid. In the brief interval—1924–1929—between the first post-war slump and the great slump the League slowly grew and gained strength. But the partial breakdown of capitalism in the big slump created a new situation in which the three liberal assumptions became more and more remote from reality. With them the League and Liberalism itself as a political force began to fade away, and new forces began to shape world events.

Subsequent chapters will analyse what happened during and after the slump. We cannot close this chapter better than by quoting a statement of Sir Arthur Salter's. For Sir Arthur, as a high civil servant who virtually controlled the Inter-Allied Shipping and Transport Board during the war, was afterwards for one year

secretary of the Reparations Commission, and after that for ten years Director of the Economic and Financial Section of the League of Nations Secretariat, has an unrivalled experience of world conditions. And this is his summing up of the first post-war decade:

"After the first needs of urgent relief . . . the vast reconstruction effort of the post-war world was directed to the re-establishment of the pre-war system with the one notable addition of the League of Nations. . . . For a time the success seemed almost complete, and likely to be permanent. Consider the position ten years after the cessation of hostilities—in 1928. Everywhere throughout the Western world pre-war standards of prosperity had been surpassed, and the pre-war system re-established. . . . In spite of local distresses, some political menaces, and many difficult political problems, prosperity seemed to have been regained; parliamentary government to have been justified and reinforced; peace to be reasonably assured. A little further progress along the lines on which success had already been achieved; steady work in each country upon its domestic and social problems—and the future seemed to promise a civilisation, perhaps not less stable, and certainly much richer, than anything known in the last century.

"Then came the sudden and devastating collapse in the economic life of the world, in its financial system, in parliamentary government, in the new structure of peaceful international relations. The world depression of 1929; the financial chaos of 1931; the new dictatorship in Germany of 1933 and its profound repercussions elsewhere; the diminished membership and reduced authority of the League as disputes and menaces alienated Japan, Germany, and Italy, came in rapid succession; and a new race in armaments, at once a reflection and a cause of political tension, was

inaugurated with the breakdown of the Disarmament Conference.

" This tale of collapse, extending over the whole range of man's collective constructive efforts of the first decade after the war, cannot now be retold. But it is necessary to emphasise the central feature to be observed in every sphere of disintegration. It was the old system that had been rebuilt; and this system proved in some respects unsuitable to the new conditions, and not strong enough to control the new forces " (*World Trade and Its Future*, pp. 32, 33, 35–6).

CHAPTER IV

THE LEAGUE AFTER THE GREAT SLUMP

WHAT WERE THE NEW FORCES that broke down the old system so laboriously re-established in the first ten years after the war, and how did they affect " the one notable addition " to the old system—the League of Nations? In other words, what were the international consequences of the great slump?

The first result of the slump was a further development of " monopoly " or " finance " capitalism. The great depression, says the *World Economic Survey* of the Economic Intelligence Service of the League of Nations, in its 1933–4 number, led to a great deal of reorganisation and re-grouping of productive activity. " The forces of change were working long before the depression began. . . . The system of free enterprise had long passed the era when keen competition among small unrelated units of production was general. As the need for greater capital aggregations arose in industry and commerce,

the tendency towards monopolistic controls naturally became greater. . . . It is generally agreed that the tendency was increasing in recent years. . . . There was, therefore, a convergence of varied forces from within private capitalist industry towards an increasing degree of large-scale organisation and monopolistic control. During the depression, such controls were diverted into predominantly national channels, and were directly and consciously reinforced by Government policy almost everywhere."

Naturally, as the *World Economic Survey* further states:

"The large-scale financial operations necessary to provide capital for great modern undertakings tended to shift control further back into the hands of those who organised the financial rather than the industrial operations. This more generalised direction, while quite compatible with keen competition between rival groups, removed the controls of the economic system much further from the individual worker or consumer."

The further the controls of the economic system moved away from the worker and consumer, the nearer they moved to the control of the State. In other words, as "finance" and "monopoly" capitalism developed during the slump, the plutocracy—the lords of business and banking—grew stronger, and exerted ever greater influence on Governments.

The second result of the slump was that the plutocracy drove the Governments into economic nationalism. In order to go on earning profits in spite of the partial collapse of capitalism in the great slump, the vested interests of capitalism insisted on quotas, subsidies, tariffs, and other restrictions on international trade, in order to protect their home markets. They succeeded so well that, at the height of the depression, world trade had been cut down by two-thirds.

As a result of this stampede into economic nationalism under the pressure of vested interests seeking to escape from the consequences of their own capitalist slump, the Governments, says the League Economic Committee, "*were in fact no longer masters of their own economic policy*" (italics in the original).

Even economic nationalism soon proved not enough to rescue capitalism from the plight to which it had been reduced through its great slump. All the Governments were highly successful in raising trade barriers against imports from each other. But in doing so they soon found they were losing the foreign markets for their own exports. The new home markets gained (at the price of a higher cost of living) by protection speedily showed signs of becoming glutted.

From the outset the vested interests, and the Governments they controlled, had appealed to panic and patriotism in order to justify the policies of economic nationalism which they were imposing. Protection, subsidies, and quotas, they explained, were necessary not only to keep the foreigner out of our home markets, but also in order to be self-sufficing and strong in case of war. Very soon war preparations became an integral part of the process of "recovery" from the slump. This was the third result of the slump. The official publications of the League and of the I.L.O. record with growing apprehension, year by year, how rearmament is increasingly becoming the backbone of economic recovery in all capitalist countries.

"It is notorious," says Mr. Harold Butler, the Director of the International Labour Office, in his annual report of 1936, "that a great expansion of armament manufacture is taking place in all the principal industrial countries, either for their own account or for that of foreign customers. . . . In so far as industrial prosperity is founded on warlike preparation, it is not only sinister

but hollow and unreal. The manufacture of arms adds nothing to national wealth. . . . When a country imports materials for armaments she produces nothing to export in return: under the existing system of barter trade she has to be content with fewer of the imports needed for feeding her people or providing materials for normal economic activity. Moreover, it contains an even greater menace in that countries which have become dependent on armaments for keeping down their unemployment, and thus maintaining a fictitious prosperity, no longer dare to slacken the pace of their war manufacture for fear of the social consequences which would ensue."

The plutocracy which waxed stronger during the slump, and drove Governments into economic nationalism and war preparations, by appeals to panic and patriotism, in order to be able to go on earning profits, necessarily operated through the political parties and forces most suitable for this purpose. In other words, a wave of political reaction was the fourth result of the great slump. In countries where democracy had never existed, or was recent, and the peoples were politically immature, political reaction, financed and stimulated by the plutocracy, assumed the form of capitalist counter-revolution known as Fascism. This happened in Italy after the first post-war slump and in Germany and Japan after the great slump. The great slump also produced a crop of semi-Fascist régimes in most of Central Europe and a large part of South America, and Fascist movements in practically every capitalist country. In the older and politically seasoned democracies, however, reaction has so far assumed constitutional forms, in the shape of coalitions of capitalist parties forming Governments which call themselves "national," because they claim to have superseded and transcended party politics and to represent "national unity."

These, then, were the four results of the great slump:

First, a growth in the economic power and political influence of "finance" or "monopoly" capitalism—that is, of the plutocracy, the vested interests of capitalism, of all that is represented in this country by the City and F.B.I. The second, third, and fourth results have been the use of their power by the plutocracy to help into office politically reactionary Governments, and to push them into economic nationalism and war preparations. The main motive in all these developments has been to preserve the power and privileges of the propertied classes and to frustrate the claims of the working class for social justice, in the teeth of the distress created by the great slump.

It is fairly obvious what effect these developments were bound to have on the League of Nations. The London Monetary and Economic Conference of 1933 was to bring about "economic disarmament"—that is, a lowering of tariff barriers and a revival of world trade and investment. How could it do so when most of the Governments represented at it were not "masters in their own houses," but merely the tools of vested interests pushing them into more and more economic nationalism?

The Disarmament Conference was bound to fail because so many Governments represented at it were merely the tools of their arms manufacturers and allied vested interests, determined on rearmament as their only means of economic and social survival in the conditions created by the slump.

The history of the Fascist aggressions since 1931 is merely a series of particular illustrations of how the four world-wide consequences of the slump traced above have worked out in the particular historical, geographical, and political circumstances of the countries concerned.

Let us first take the case of Japan. There finance capital has developed to the point where the "family" banking

houses of Mitsui, Mitsubishi, and Sumitomo—known as the Big Three—hold one quarter of Japan's finance capital, while five more firms hold another quarter (that is, the Big Eight hold one half). These powerful financial groups, in conjunction with the Satsuma and Chosu clans (big land-owning families of the old feudal aristocracy, which traditionally supplied Navy and Army officers respectively; of late they have begun to fuse, socially and economically, with Japanese big business) practically control Japan's public life. In the distress caused by the slump their power was challenged by the mostly lower middle class and small land-owner Younger Officers' Movement in the Army. But this rift was soon healed in face of the danger from the discontent of the masses and "dangerous thoughts" among the intelligentsia, on the basis of going in for intensive rearmament, an Army-big-business dictatorship, and the Manchurian adventure in 1931. That did silence internal discontent for a time, and give a profitable investment outlet for Japanese finance capital as well as jobs for the military. But it did so at the cost of committing Japan to war preparations that pressed ever harder on the pitifully low standard of living of the Japanese people, of making an implacable enemy of China, and of isolating Japan in the world. The Japanese plutocracy and their military allies had got themselves into a position where they could not stand still, for China was growing stronger and there were limits in time and suffering to what the Japanese people would stand. And so they struck again in 1937. This time China is resisting. Sooner or later external and internal resistance combined will be strong enough to bring about the destruction of Japan's plutocracy and militarism in a social revolution. Until then Japan will remain a menace to civilisation.

The rise of Italian Fascism shows many striking

resemblances to what happened in Japan. Only in Italy the lower middle class revolt, and its capture and exploitation by Italian finance capital, took place in the first post-war slump. External conditions were not so favourable to aggression as in Japan, and the Army stood aloof. Therefore economic nationalism, war preparations, and war propaganda, coupled with dictatorship and domestic frightfulness, sufficed to keep the régime going until the great slump. The total failure of Fascism to relieve the social and economic distress arising out of that slump created an internal situation so serious that something drastic had to be done. Hence the Abyssinian adventure. That adventure was successful in producing a state of mind where the Italian people would put up with anything for a considerable time. But it also created a situation where Mussolini could not stand still except at the risk of his pre-Abyssinian troubles arising again in even more dangerous forms. Hence the Spanish adventure. Some day external and internal resistance will combine to overthrow the Italian plutocracy and the Fascist régime with which they have identified themselves. But until Italy undergoes a social revolution she will remain a menace to civilisation.

In Germany the lower middle class revolt, and its support and exploitation by the German plutocracy, was the direct consequence of the distress caused by the great slump. The evidence for this is overwhelming. The popular but superficial view that the Nazi régime in Germany was the result of Germany's harsh treatment at the Peace Conference and after cannot survive any serious investigation. In 1928, ten years after Versailles, Hitler polled only 800,000 votes. Two years later, in 1930, he polled 6½ million votes. Had the German people forgotten the Versailles Treaty between 1918 and 1928, and suddenly remembered it again between 1928 and 1930? Or was some spectacular international

injustice inflicted upon Germany in those two years? On the contrary, in 1924, just after the Ruhr invasion, when German indignation over the Versailles Treaty was at its height, Hitler polled barely 900,000 votes—that is, only a trifle more than in 1928, when the policy of conciliation had been successfully applied for some years. Between 1928 and 1930 there was a Labour Government in this country which carried further the policy of conciliation begun in 1925 with Locarno and Germany's entry into the League, and continued by Briand and Stresemann, by bringing about the evacuation of the Rhineland and putting in hand arrangements for settling reparations and summoning the Disarmament Conference. And yet between 1928 and 1930 Hitler's vote increased by over 800 per cent! There is no possible explanation of German Fascism in terms of Germany's international ill treatment that fits these simple facts. Nor does the explanation of Germany's aggressiveness in terms of her ill treatment explain: (*a*) The absence of aggressiveness of the Soviet Union, which was ill treated far worse and for a much longer time than Germany; (*b*) The aggressiveness of Italy and Japan, who were victors in the Great War; (*c*) The existence of Fascist or semi-Fascist régimes in a large part of the world, and of Fascist movements in practically every capitalist country.

The only explanation that will fit the facts adduced above about the rise of German Fascism is the fact that between 1928 and 1930 the world slump had hit Germany so hard that there were 7,000,000 unemployed and a ruined and desperate middle class, and that the plutocracy were ready to do anything to avert the danger of social revolution—including the danger of the working class using its political rights under democracy to gain power by legal means. That explanation is borne out by abundant direct testimony. Moreover, the Nazi

leaders themselves are most insistent about the fact that they seized power in order to save Germany from "Bolshevism." Herr Hitler has again and again made it clear that he considers the democracies as deeply tainted with, and in constant danger of succumbing to, "Bolshevism," for by "Bolshevism" he means any Socialist or "Popular Front" parties or movements winning a general election. He makes no bones about it that "anti-Bolshevism" is the main reason for and justification of the Nazi régime.[1]

Nazi Germany is geographically so placed that she can hardly invade any of her neighbours without grave risk of a general war. But she has broken a good many treaties, committed a great deal of aggression in Spain, and conducted herself in a swashbuckling, brutal manner. War preparations are the economic backbone of the Nazi régime, and the war spirit is its spiritual mainstay. The Nazis have got Germany into a position where, if she knows beforehand that aggression would encounter determined collective resistance, she will stay within her frontiers until the Nazi régime is destroyed by internal upheavals. If not, Hitler will sooner or later start a big war by gambling on being able to "get away" with some bit of aggression and then finding out he was mistaken only when it is too late to back down.

[1] Cf. Hitler's Proclamation at the Ninth Nüremberg Nazi Party Congress on September 7th, 1937:

"The social contract under which men live has become obsolete, and we live to witness its breakdown, here and there, where it is in entire decay.

"When National Socialism started out on its historical struggle for the German people, this question stood out as the decisive one. For wars and defeats have a less disastrous significance in the life of the nations than the internal crises of the social structure.

"After a lost war a nation can swiftly recuperate. But, once the internal order of a nation has been disturbed, centuries may pass before recovery is effected. Then a nation may fall and never recover again."

At the very moment when the Fascist Powers committed aggression, tore up treaties, and walked out of the League, the Soviet Union entered the League and strove vigorously to restore and strengthen collective security. Before that the Soviet Union did all in its power to make a success of the Disarmament Conference, as the late Arthur Henderson, who was its President, frequently testified. That is because the Russian Communists are internationalists who believe in world government and detest and despise war. It is because every penny spent on war preparations is just so much waste and loss to the Socialist economic system of the U.S.S.R. It is because, as Dr. L. Lorwin and Mr. A. Abramson, two high officials of the International Labour Office, wrote in their report on *The Present Phase of Economic and Social Development in the U.S.S.R.*, after a prolonged visit to that country: "From those who guide policy to those who merely execute it, there runs a common purpose in relation to the future. In everyone there is a fierce pride growing out of the desire to prove to the Western world that the Soviet people will build up a civilisation which will have a high material standard, and be superior in its spiritual values to the rest of the world. . . . They [Soviet citizens] have a strong feeling that they are on the upward grade. They are convinced that, given a period of world peace, the U.S.S.R. will, at the present rate of development, become a leading industrial power in less than a decade.[1] That is why there is such general eagerness for the maintenance of peace."

This is friendly, but impartial, testimony from a good source. In the *Spectator* of May 14th, 1937, Mr. Everard Allardice gives equally friendly and impartial testimony

[1] This may. During the years that the capitalist world in slump has passed through the waters of affliction, and world trade has dragged to one-third of its 1929 level, the Soviet Union, according to the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics of the League of Nations, increased its industrial production by 300 per cent.

about conditions under the Nazi régime: "At the moment Germany is in a blind alley, distrusted by all who could help her, and offering no scope or prospects to her younger generations, to whom war may seem the only source of salvation, for, if they won, all would be well again, and, if they lost, conditions could hardly be worse. This feeling will come in spite of a very genuine dislike of the idea of a war which is felt by the Germans individually, and there lies the greatest danger."

From what has been said it is pretty clear that the foreign policies of the Fascist dictatorships and of the Soviet Union are diametrically different because of the difference in the social structure and needs of the Fascist and Soviet régimes respectively. The Fascist dictatorships have aggressive foreign politics, because in them the plutocracy is holding down the working class by fraud and force in order to perpetuate capitalism. The Soviet Union wants peace and international co-operation, because in it the working class are in power and have replaced capitalism by Socialism.

In the democracies there is since the slump a clear relationship between foreign policy and the internal struggle between "Right" and "Left"—that is, between the defenders of the plutocracy and the political representatives of the working class.

The next chapter will show how this relationship has worked out in the case of Great Britain. There is no space in this book to discuss the parallel situation in other democracies. In any case, it is British foreign policy that concerns us most, for we can influence it, and it is of such crucial importance that it can determine whether this country is to continue the present drift all the way into the next world war, or shall rally the peace-loving nations before it is too late to save peace.

The lesson of the disasters that have since the great slump befallen the whole attempt to organise peace

through the League has been neatly summed up as follows by the Director of the International Labour Office in his 1936 annual report: "In 1936 the perception that the failure to ensure economic and social equilibrium was the most radical flaw in the peace settlement is dimly beginning to dawn. . . . Economic and social problems have become political problems of the first national and international magnitude. . . . That is why it is no longer possible to dissociate the future of peace from the future of social justice."

CHAPTER V

THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND THE LEAGUE

TO UNDERSTAND the National Government's relation to the League it is necessary to understand the Government's background, the purpose for which they exist, and the connection between their home, Imperial, and foreign policy.

Background has two aspects: time and space. As regards background in time, it is important to remember that the Conservative Party and the Governments they control have never since the war shown any sign of accepting the treaty obligations of the Covenant as binding on this country, and have, on the contrary, always shown that they still pin their faith to international anarchy and power politics.

It was the Conservative Party that was chiefly responsible in this country for prolonging the world war for one unnecessary year after the Russian revolution, in order to have a military victory and a dictated peace. It was Conservative M.P.s from Mr. Lloyd George's

khaki election Parliament of "hard-faced men who looked as though they had done well out of the war," as a contemporary observer described them, and including several members of the present Government, that sent Mr. Lloyd George the famous telegram warning him against letting off Germany too lightly. The Versailles Treaty was not harsh enough for them! It was the Conservative Party that was chiefly responsible for the bloody horror of intervention in Russia.

When the Conservative Government killed the Geneva Protocol of the first Labour Government in 1924, and thereby killed the chance of an early and successful Disarmament Conference, they did so on grounds that constituted a repudiation of the fundamental principles of the Covenant and of any collective system. The Locarno Treaties, although they had their good points, were based on the idea that the general obligations of the Covenant (Articles 10 and 16) to resist aggression by collective action meant nothing, and could not be made to mean anything.

Between 1925 and 1929 the Conservative Government rejected all attempts of other nations to bring about the general acceptance of arbitration—that is, of compulsory settlement of disputes on the basis of law. It did so on grounds that were a re-hash of the old doctrine of power politics—the right to be judge in one's own cause and to use force to uphold one's own view of "honour and vital interests."

When in 1928 the Conservative Government accepted the Briand-Kellogg Pact for renouncing war as an instrument of national policy, it accompanied its acceptance with the declaration that the Pact did not apply to areas (unspecified) outside the British Empire where the Government considered it had "vital interests" to defend. This was pure power politics, and incompatible with any belief that the treaty obligations of the

Covenant were binding. It meant, as the Belgian Socialist Senator, Louis de Brouckère, said publicly, that the whole world was under the menace of British protection. For it reserved the Government's right to use war as an instrument of national policy in any part of the world where the Government considered they had vital interests to uphold.

The Conservative Party boycotted, and leading Members of the Government denounced, the Peace Ballot, until it proved an overwhelming success, when they changed their tune. They did so just in time to win the 1935 General Election on the basis of promises that they meant to uphold the Covenant against Italian aggression in Abyssinia. The promises were subsequently broken. The 1936 White Paper on Defence, although containing a perfunctory reference to the collective system, made it clear that they are rearming in order to "exercise the influence and authority in international affairs" which are required "for the defence of vital British interests."

That the Government do not recognise any obligation under the Covenant to use our arms in defence of a victim of aggression, or even to incur the remotest risk of collective action of any kind that might possibly lead to an attack upon us by an aggressor, has been made abundantly clear by the Government's whole record. It was explicitly admitted in a speech by Mr. Eden which was quoted by the Prime Minister (then Mr. Baldwin) in the House on February 18th, 1937, as putting the views of the Government "very clearly, very fairly, and succinctly." The speech said that our "definite obligations" were to use armaments "in our own defence, and in defence of the territories of the British Commonwealth of Nations," in pursuance of our Treaties of Alliance with Irak and Egypt, and "in defence of France and Belgium against unprovoked aggression."

The British Government, it should be recalled at this point, is the judge of what constitutes " unprovoked " aggression. If, for instance, France wished to allow the Spanish Government to buy arms, or to give assistance to Czechoslovakia when attacked, the British Government may consider that this would constitute a " provocation " to Germany or Italy to attack France, and may warn the French Government to let Spain or Czechoslovakia be overrun, or to face aggression without British help if she persists. This form of pressure has already been used under the guise of " non-intervention " to prevent France letting the Spanish Government buy arms to defend itself against Italian aggression.

The Eden-Baldwin statement continued: " In addition, our armaments may be used in bringing help to a victim of aggression in any case where in our judgment it would be proper under the provisions of the Covenant to do so. I use the word ' may ' deliberately, because in such an instance there is no automatic obligation to take military action. It is, moreover, right this should be so, for nations cannot be expected to incur automatic military obligations save for areas where their vital interests are concerned."

This policy merely applied the principle laid down by Mr. Chamberlain seven months earlier, when he made his famous speech in June 1936, declaring it was madness to persist with sanctions against Italy, and that henceforward Great Britain must not accept any treaty obligations to coerce an aggressor except in areas where British national interests were involved.

In point of fact, this is the policy that has always, from the beginning, been followed by the National Government. This was pointed out by no less an authority than Lord Lytton, in a speech on May 17th, 1934, criticising the Government's failure to fulfil its treaty obligations to stop Japanese aggression in Manchuria in 1931–3:

"The argument of the Foreign Secretary, which has always been loudly cheered in the House of Commons, is that, though it would be dishonourable to attack a neighbour, for the sake of national advantage, there is no obligation on us to come to the aid of a victim of aggression, if national interests make it expedient to keep out of the quarrel."

It is perfectly true, as Lord Lytton points out, that the National Government shares the belief of the Fascist Powers that treaty obligations are binding only in so far as national interests at the time make it expedient to regard them as binding. The whole foreign policy of the National Government has been the expression of that belief. The whole record of the Conservative Party since the war has shown its unwavering adherence to this belief. Mr. Amery, in a speech in the House on October 23rd, 1935, proved in detail that no Conservative Government since the war has regarded the sanctions obligations of the Covenant (i.e. Article 16, which pledges all the Members of the League to cut off all relations with an aggressor, in order to compel him to stop waging war) as binding. He complained that the country found itself in the "unsatisfactory situation" of applying sanctions to Italy, owing to "the abandonment by the Government of the policy towards the League of Nations, and more particularly towards Article 16 of the Covenant, which they pursued for some ten years, and to the adoption of a policy which, up to the last few months, they repudiated and even treated with scorn."

Mr. Amery attributed this change to the evil influence of the Peace Ballot, and expressed his alarm lest the change prove permanent and genuine. Subsequent events have shown that his fears were unfounded but that his analysis was correct.

In short, the Conservative Party, and the Governments they control, and, of course, the Foreign Office,

have never since the world war given up their belief in the essential principle of international anarchy and power politics. That principle consists in holding, as Sir Arnold Wilson so strikingly said in his tribute to the late Lord Grey, that one must keep one's country's bond when one thinks the country's interests require it, but not otherwise.

It is necessary to understand that the National Government and the Foreign Office are perfectly sincere about this belief. As private individuals our rulers no doubt often regret the difficulty of squaring their view of British interests with treaty obligations and with considerations of honour, justice, or mercy. As politicians with a public opinion and an Opposition to worry about, they feel it necessary to make it appear that honour and vital interests always march hand in hand. That is, since democracy has since the war so unaccountably butted into foreign affairs, and so unfortunately insists on importing into its judgments on foreign affairs moral standards that are irrelevant to power politics, our rulers feel it necessary to explain their pursuit of national interests in terms that will appeal to the common people. This becomes particularly necessary the nearer the practice of power politics brings us to the next world war. For the common people are always more ready to lay down their lives for an ideal than for "interests"—particularly if the interests involved are not their own, but the interests of the plutocracy.

But this is anticipating the outcome of this analysis of the National Government's foreign policy and of its consequences to the League and world peace. The point that has been established so far is simply that the Government's foreign policy is not influenced by treaty obligations or any considerations of honour, justice, or humanity. It is concerned exclusively with "national interests." The Government will always take any risk of war in defence of what it believes are "vital national

interests." And it will never take any risk of war, however remote, for any other cause. That is the creed of power politics and international anarchy, and devotion to that creed is what we have called the Government's background in time.

At this point the question arises: Why does not the Government consider the defence of the Covenant against aggression to be a vital national interest? After all, the Covenant of the League was framed, not by "pacifists" or "cranks," but by responsible statesmen, with the experience of four years' world war before their eyes. British statesmen played an honourable and indeed predominant part in making the Covenant. They did so because they considered, and the leaders of the whole civilised world considered, that the treaty obligations of the Covenant were the absolute minimum necessary to prevent the recurrence of another and even more fearful world war. If, then, it was true that the Covenant was the bulwark of world peace, and that Great Britain wants and needs peace as much as any country in the world, why have the National Government never considered the defence of the Covenant against aggression to be a national interest? Why have they reduced the bulwark of peace to a scrap of paper?

The answer to that question lies in what we have called the Government's background in space. By this we mean the intimate connection between the situation in this country and in the rest of the world. During and since the great slump the same forces have been at work here as on the Continent and in Asia and America. Our national, geographical, and historical peculiarities have determined the forms in which these forces manifest themselves here, and the rate at which they are operating. But substantially the same forces are at work in this island as in other countries, moving in not dissimilar ways to essentially similar ends.

The depression drove up unemployment here first to two millions, and then in 1932, during the first year of the National Government and the lowest point of the world slump, to three millions. That was closely parallel to what happened all over the world at the time.

The plutocracy here, as elsewhere, were strengthened and " concentrated " by the slump, and sought to escape its consequences by plunging first into economic nationalism, and then, when that proved not enough, into war preparations. In order to do this they pushed out the Labour Government by an Anglo-American bankers' intrigue, and brought in a capitalist coalition with an overwhelming Conservative majority, by appeals to panic and patriotism in a general election not remarkable for its scrupulousness. This Government was from the outset a Conservative Government, whose prime function was to re-consolidate the capitalist social order shaken by the slump. This task it quite sincerely identified with " saving the nation." It equally sincerely regarded itself as a " National " Government, claimed to represent " national unity transcending party politics," and declared that the party system was dead. In other words, this Government identified " national interests " with the interests of British capitalism, or, more specifically, of our plutocracy, of the City and F.B.I. That is the Government's background in space, its link with what is happening in other countries.

For all this is merely the British equivalent of what took place in Italy after the first post-war slump and in Germany and Japan after the great slump. That was what Mr. E. M. Forster meant when he so wittily said we were living in this country under Fabio-Fascism. Our National Government is doing in (so far) democratic and parliamentary forms what the Fascist dictatorships are doing by other means. In Germany, Italy, and Japan there has been a capitalist counter-revolution. In

this country we are living under capitalist reaction. Its function is to preserve the social and colonial *status quo* in the teeth of the new forces abroad in the post-war world, and active since the great slump.

This identity of function with the Fascist régimes is realised by the Government themselves. At "National Labour Party" luncheons in 1933 and 1934, Lord (then Mr.) Baldwin, Sir John Simon, and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald were eloquent about the fact that the "National" Government was our British way of applying the same principle of national concentration to save the country in the world crisis that was being applied by other methods in Germany and Italy.

This makes it clear that the fundamental purpose of the "National" Government is essentially similar to that of the Fascist régimes: it is to keep the working class, represented by Labour, from obtaining power, and to defend the class interest, the power and privileges of the rich, at any cost and by any means. The Government's mission in life, in which they believe quite as devoutly and blindly as they do in power politics, is to fight Socialism, by fair means if possible, by dubious means if convenient, and by foul means if necessary. This purpose, which the Government and the Conservative Party identify perfectly sincerely with "saving the country," informs their home, Imperial, and foreign policy alike. In international relations they pursue this purpose by the non-moral methods of power politics. And they do all this, it cannot be too often repeated, with entire devotion to duty and complete conviction that they are doing right, that they are defending "national interests" and "saving the country."

How do these convictions and commitments of the "National" Government affect its attitude to the League? A few simple facts indicate what the answer must be, although the conclusion to which they point

will subsequently be confirmed from the Government's record.

In the first place it must be remembered that the League and the I.L.O. were born of a revolt against power politics, international anarchy, Imperialism, and the exploitation of the workers by the plutocracy. They were to afford an alternative and better way of conducting world affairs. They were intended as a first step toward a new civilisation, based on social justice and world government. It was only a very short and timid first step. But, such as it was, it was extorted from capitalist vested interests and capitalist reaction by progressives only under the overwhelming pressure of the workers' threat of revolution and of the immense longing for peace of the common people after four years of world war.

The great slump was the sign that we had not, in the ten years since the war, gone far and fast enough towards world government and social justice. It showed that events have once more outstripped our ideas and institutions, and that we must now, like Alice in Looking-Glass Land, take the Red Queen by the hand and run hard if we want even to keep up with the landscape, let alone get beyond the point where we started with such high hopes in 1920.

But capitalist vested interests and capitalist reaction do not draw that lesson from the slump. On the contrary, they think the slump shows that things have gone much too far, and that it is time a stop were put to all this nonsense about the League and social justice. Their motto is, "Back to pre-war"—back to international anarchy and power politics in world affairs, and back to a monopoly of Government for the propertied classes in home affairs. Our Government's claim to be "National" and "above party" is nothing more nor less than the denial of Labour's right to exist as an alternative

Government. The Conservative Party believe that there ought not to be an Opposition at all—unless and until capitalism has been "saved" to the satisfaction of the capitalists, which, as things are going, won't be this side of a world war.

This primary condition of the Government's existence is enough to show why it can hardly be expected officiously to strive to keep the League alive. But there is much more. For, in the second place, the National Government are entirely in the hands of the plutocracy—that is, the vested interests of capitalism, the City, and the F.B.I. This is a familiar enough phenomenon in home policy. Everyone knows that tariffs, quotas, and subsidies have been showered on every vested interest strong enough to press its demand. Exactly the same influences drove the Government into the policy of Imperial preferences at Ottawa.

In the third place, the National Government are relying on rearmament to keep down unemployment. The Unemployment Assistance Board published a report early in 1937 saying that if and when the present rearmament programme was completed unemployment would again rise to 16¾ per cent of the total working population, or to about 2,200,000. Sir William Beveridge, the Chairman of the Board, made a speech at the end of January 1937, estimating that the number of unemployed at the end of rearmament would rise again to nearly 3,000,000. But the Government, under the pressure of the plutocracy, have rejected all proposals for public works or other action by public authorities to relieve unemployment, on the ground, among others, that they would interfere with private enterprise. They have allocated a mere pittance—£2,000,000—for the distressed areas. Therefore rearmament is their only hope in home affairs.

The fourth fact, which is all of a piece with the other

three, is that the survival of the National Government is bound up with the survival of the Fascist régimes. Suppose that the Chinese, the Abyssinians, and the Spaniards were to receive enough help and encouragement—as under the Covenant they ought to, and as in practice would be neither difficult nor dangerous—to enable them to drive out the Japanese and Italian invaders. That would undoubtedly mean revolutions in Japan and Italy, and that in turn would very quickly mean such grave troubles in Germany and in the whole belt of Central European semi-Fascist States as to put an end to all danger of war. But then rearmament would have to cease, and the nightmare of fear would be lifted from the peoples of France and Great Britain. These events would precipitate the next world slump, which already haunts the minds of our statesmen, and at the same time give an immense fillip to the Left throughout the world. Capitalism survived the last slump, here as elsewhere, by going in for economic nationalism, rearmament, and appeals to panic and patriotism. But if the fear of war were to end, owing to the defeat of the Fascist régimes, and war preparations were consequently to cease, how could the National Government possibly survive the next slump which it already sees coming and knows it is powerless to avert? For there is nothing left for capitalism to do to save itself.

The National Government fear and dislike the Fascist régimes. They want peace, and they believe that the Fascist Powers will sooner or later attempt to despoil the British Empire. But the National Government depend for bare existence on the continuation of war preparations and on the British people's fear of being attacked by the Fascist Powers. They dread and detest the drift to world war. But they live by not stopping it. Therefore they neither will nor can stop it.

These being the objective facts of the situation, the

National Government are of necessity driven, each time a Fascist power commits aggression, to save the aggressor from defeat. That means they have to adopt the only alternative policy, which is to bargain with the aggressor for a " deal " at the expense of his victim—or of anyone or anything except " national interests," as the National Government see such interests. The following examples from the Government's record show how this process works. The state of the world to-day reveals its consequences. The next chapter will show how it is bound to end unless stopped in time.

When Japan broke loose in Manchuria in 1931–3 the National Government pursued a policy which has been summed up as follows by an impartial and well-informed observer:

" Throughout the year 1932, the Foreign Office in Whitehall took advantage of its key position between the United States and the small States, members of the League, on the one hand, and between the United States and Japan on the other, to finesse in the manner of those diplomatic virtuosi who sought to save their own countries and to ' preserve the balance of power ' by deftly playing off one neighbour against another at the least possible risk to themselves " (from the *Survey of International Affairs*, edited by Mr. Arnold Toynbee and published by the Royal Institute of International Affairs).

What were the " national interests " in defence of which the British Government were playing this game of power politics? A Dutch Far Eastern expert, of irreproachably Conservative views, Mr. H. Th. de Booy, tells us, in *Pacific Affairs* of March 1935:

" The friendship of Japan cannot be disregarded, as Japan indirectly protects British interests against the

spread of Communism. . . . Great Britain, however, is also sensitive to American interests on the Continent of Asia, and both nations would suffer if the influence of Japan were free to spread unchecked. Great Britain, therefore, of necessity manœuvres between Japan, the Soviet Union, China, and America. . . . For the Western Powers . . . the outlook is full of anxiety. They have to deal with the fact that . . . while Japan is undermining the Western nations economically, it protects them politically against the spread of Communism. The *status quo* in which the Western Powers are so vitally interested is, in the ultimate analysis, a balance between Communist expansionism on the continent of Asia, and the economic Imperialism of Japan."

"Communism" in this context is loosely used to include not only the Chinese Communist Party, but the whole movement for the national emancipation and unification of China, so as to end her "semi-colonial" status and the "semi-feudal" servitudes of the Chinese people. All this was anathema to the vested interests of Western and Japanese capitalism, for it threatened all kinds of monopolies, privileges, investments, and concessions in China that had been built up precisely on these "semi-colonial" and "semi-feudal" foundations. Therefore, in so far as Japanese aggression was "punishing" the Chinese and "teaching them their place" it was not unwelcome to Western Imperialists, who had been growing more and more apprehensive about China's increasing "uppishness." At the same time the situation was anxious, for the Japanese might go too far and disregard Western "interests." Therefore it was necessary to bargain with Japan. On top of that the Government had to "wangle" things at Geneva so as to avoid applying the Covenant while not incurring the blame for helping Japan to wreck the League. Finally,

Lord (then Mr.) Baldwin, too, has since confessed what the Government were thinking at that time, with what he himself called " appalling frankness ":

" From 1933, I and my friends were all very worried about what was happening in Europe. You will remember that at the time the Disarmament Conference was sitting in Geneva. You will remember at that time there was probably a stronger pacifist feeling running through this country than at any time since the war . . . That was the feeling in the country in 1933. My position as the leader of a great party was not altogether a comfortable one. I asked myself what chance was there . . . within the next year or two of that feeling being so changed that the country would give a mandate for rearmament? " (House of Commons, November 12th, 1936).

But the Government persisted, and were presently successful beyond their wildest hopes in preserving the bombing plane, not only in the Middle East and India, but considerably nearer home. In their struggle to bury the Disarmament Conference and get on with rearmament the Government were ably assisted by the arms manufacturers. Mr. P. J. Noel Baker, in the book already mentioned, gives details of the subsidies paid by arms manufacturers to various patriotic leagues and societies to conduct propaganda against the Disarmament Conference and for a new arms race. The profits of rearmament were regarded as a necessity for the " recovery " of capitalism from the slump, and rearmament was pressed on that as well as on other more general grounds of " national interest."

In the case of Italy and Abyssinia, the Government's policy was to drive a bargain with Mussolini by which Great Britain was to let him help himself to Abyssinia in exchange for his becoming our ally against Germany.

Over Spain the Government have been willing to let Mussolini help Franco win, in return for a bargain with Italy about mineral and " development " rights in Spain and about our Imperial interests in and around the Mediterranean. This is partly because they do not want to defeat Mussolini and partly because they do want to defeat the Spanish workers.

With regard to Japan's bigger and better war of aggression, the Government's attitude is summed up in *The Times* leader of September 4th, 1937:

" This war is perhaps a riskier speculation than the men of the sword yet realise. A policy of co-operation in China with other Powers, and more particularly with the British Empire and America, which have vast interests in the Far East, might well have secured more solid if less spectacular advantages for the Island Empire than the heavy financial burdens and unlimited political and strategical liabilities which seem likely to be the fruits of a victory that has not yet been won."

Here, too, the policy is a bargain with Japan by which British Imperialism would become the junior partner and client of Japanese Imperialism in China. There is no doubt the Government do not like this prospect. But they dislike it less than joining with the U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. to help China defeat Japan. For that would mean the end of all Imperialism in the Far East.

In short, the Government have reverted to precisely the foreign policy that brought us to 1914—the policy of semi-isolation, plus an arms race, plus Imperialist bargains at the expense of weaker States for the purpose of securing potential Allies or of buying off potential enemies. The Government are doing this, not because they want war, for they want peace just as much as did the Liberal Government of Asquith and Grey. They are doing it because they feel obliged to pursue this policy,

although they realise perfectly well that it is bound to end sooner or later in a great war. For to uphold the Covenant against aggression would mean taking sides with the U.S.S.R. and such victims of aggression as the Abyssinians, or the Chinese, or the Spanish workers, against the Fascist Powers. The success of such a policy would be suicidal to the " national interests " which the National Government exist to defend, and ultimately to the Government itself. Therefore, any such policy cannot and will not be adopted by this Government.

But its pre-war foreign policy is not working well in the post-slump world, because the world of to-day is very different from the world before the war. The next chapter describes what is happening in the world to-day, and the ultimate consequences of the National Government's foreign policy.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE WORLD

LET US NOW TAKE a bird's-eye view of what is happening in the world, in the light of the facts established in the previous chapters.

The League of Nations and the I.L.O. came into being as a first step toward world government based on social justice, which was recognised at the Peace Conference as the only alternative to another world war. They were the outcome of partial victory for liberals (in the broad, non-party sense of progressive capitalists), plus the revolutionary pressure of the workers, in their " ideological conflict " at the Peace Conference with Conservatism and plutocracy.

It was emphasised again and again at the outset of the League's career that the League could function successfully only in a "world made safe for democracy," in President Wilson's famous phrase. A second assumption was that all States that mattered in world affairs would shortly become members of the League. The third assumption was that armaments would soon be reduced and limited by international agreement. The Covenant, it was emphasised, was a very loose document, containing the bare minimum of obligations necessary to enable a universal League of lightly armed democracies to function effectively.

It was taken for granted by the framers of the Covenant that the economic and social order based on private enterprise—that is, capitalism—would go on functioning after the war much as it had done before.

It was assumed that capitalism had received such a shock that it would cure itself of its own inherent anarchy, and substitute world government for Imperialism. Plutocracy and Conservatism, it was thought, would sacrifice their vested interests in international anarchy and loyally work the League that had been thrust upon them and to which they were constrained to pay lip-service.

For a time this view worked—not perfectly, but well enough to warrant hope for the future. The old economic system seemed to have been successfully restored, and the new League grafted on to it seemed to have a fair chance of becoming strong enough to preserve peace.

Then the very foundations of capitalism slipped and cracked in the great slump. With that came a sharpening of the class-struggle until it dominated home and world affairs alike. The liberal assumptions about the future of the world were swept into limbo, and Liberalism itself as an organised, independent political force melted away; not in this country alone, but in all countries. The world found itself in the grip of grimmer and more elemental

forces than those dreamed of in the liberal philosophy.

The plutocracy, seeking to rescue capitalism—that is, to preserve their own power, privileges, and profits—used their influence to plunge their several countries into economic nationalism, political reaction, and war preparations. By these means they did indeed rescue capitalism and defeat or defraud the workers' claim to social justice. But they did so only by setting capitalism on the road to Fascism and war. Some countries have gone farther and faster along that road than others. But the plutocracy and the Governments they dominate in well-nigh all capitalist countries are travelling under identical compulsions in the same direction, and, if not stopped in time, will ultimately arrive at the same destination.

For Fascism is simply capitalism at bay. Fascism is capitalism that has moved from reaction to counter-revolution, from defrauding to destroying democracy, from cheating to coercing the workers. The plutocracy in the Fascist States have done all this, not because they liked it, but as the lesser of two evils between which they had to choose. The greater evil, which they rejected, was to let the workers use their political rights under democracy in order to bring into power Governments that would make good their claim to social justice at the expense of the plutocracy.

The Fascist régimes, and the vested interests of capitalism they shelter, have cheated the "revolution complex" of their peoples. They can survive only by turning it into a "war complex." That is, the Fascist régimes got into power largely on programmes of social demagogy, which made vague but tremendous promises appealing to the revolutionary discontent of the suffering lower middle class and of the politically backward workers and peasants. But, once in power, the Fascist régimes belied all their promises. They are literally

unable to deliver the goods. The standard of living keeps on going down in the Fascist countries. The only way the Fascist régimes could satisfy the demands of the plutocracy who were their real masters was by establishing a big business dictatorship over economic life, based on economic nationalism and war preparations. To make their peoples acquiesce in these conditions an iron dictatorship was not enough. In addition there had to be a strict control of news and views—the Press, the radio, the cinema, education, etc.—and the fullest use of this control in order to create a "war atmosphere," to whip up fear and hatred of other countries by blaming them for all the troubles of the Fascist régimes, to make scapegoats of "Jews" and "Marxists," etc.

But big business in the Fascist régimes cannot survive penned up within the limits imposed by the economic nationalism to which they had to resort, and on which they are now dependent. War preparations on the present scale will soon lead to bankruptcy and press down the standard of living so hard as to make it impossible for even Fascist methods to hold down popular discontent. The existence and success of the Soviet Union is a growing menace to the Fascist régimes, and the possibility of the workers in the surviving democracies bringing in "Left" Governments that will move toward Socialism is only one degree less a menace.

For these reasons the Fascist régimes are compelled by the law of their being, by sheer necessity, to be against democracy, social justice, and reason; for dictatorship, authority, and dogma—that is, for governing by force and fraud. In foreign policy they are by the same necessity compelled to be against any collective obligations or organisation for keeping the peace and for coercing an aggressor into restoring peace; against any form of world government; against arbitration; against economic co-operation; for economic self-sufficiency; for

being judge in one's own cause; for unlimited sovereignty; for putting self-judged national interests before treaty obligations; for implacable hostility to the League, to the Soviet Union, and to the workers and the "Left" in all countries; for interference on the side of capitalist reaction and Fascist movements in other countries; for expansion by aggression; and for war as an instrument of national and social policy. These things are the official ideology of Fascism. They are not only preached in the Fascist countries and by Fascist movements everywhere, but practised by the Fascist Governments at home and abroad, by bribery and intrigue, by torture and murder, and with fire and sword. There can be no doubt that the Fascist régimes take their "ideology" seriously, and that it corresponds to their vital necessities.

On the other side is the official ideology of the Soviet Union, of the Komintern, and of the Communist Parties in all countries where they exist. That ideology has always been wholeheartedly for social justice, world government, and democracy. Only the Communists believed that social justice could come solely through the workers in all countries gaining power by social revolution; that world government could come only from the workers in all countries, after gaining power, uniting in a World Union of Socialist Soviet Republics; and that democracy could come only after a period of proletarian dictatorship had firmly laid the foundations of a Socialist society and made a capitalist counter-revolution impossible. These beliefs as to methods, in their turn were closely connected with the view that the social revolution in the U.S.S.R. could not survive and be successful unless it were soon followed by social revolutions in the leading industrial States. The latter view was discarded after the victory of Stalin over Trotsky. Its abandonment and the passage of time have profoundly modified

the above-mentioned " methodological " beliefs in practice, although they have never been repudiated in theory, and although social justice, world government, and democracy remain, as ever, the final objectives.

The new attitude as regards methods evolved rapidly during and since the slump, and was officially set forth in the reports and resolutions of the Seventh Komintern Congress in 1935. According to this new attitude, the issue to-day is not starting a social revolution, but resisting the capitalist counter-revolution—that is, stemming the drift to Fascism and war. This means co-operating with all anti-Fascist forces—which in practice means with all the forces of the Left—for the defence and fullest utilisation of what is left of parliamentary democracy and of the League of Nations against this double danger. The very process of rallying and utilising these existing forces and institutions for this purpose will create a new situation. When that new situation has arisen—that is, when the drift to Fascism and war has been definitely stopped—it will be time enough to reconsider how to give effect to the ultimate Communist objectives in the light of the situation as it will then appear. But meanwhile all the power of the Soviet Union and all the energies of the Communist Parties everywhere must be flung into the fight to save and to strengthen democracy and the League as bulwarks against Fascism and war. That is to-day the official ideology of Communism. It is being not only preached but practised, as the record of the Soviet Union at Geneva, the new Soviet Constitution, the French and Spanish Popular Fronts, the policy of the Communist Party in this country, and the Communists who have died for Spanish democracy, have shown. There can be no doubt that Communists take their " ideology " seriously, and that it corresponds to the vital necessities of the Soviet Union and of the workers' cause.

The ideological conflict which finds its concrete expression in the respective foreign policies of the Soviet Union and of the Fascist States is also taking place within the Western democracies, and is also reflected in their foreign policies. For it has its roots in the class struggle which has been temporarily lost by the workers in the Fascist States, definitely won in the U.S.S.R., and is becoming acute in the democracies. In this struggle the "National" Governments in this country and France, and the forces of big business that gathered around Governor Landon, the Republican candidate in the last U.S. election, are the democratic equivalents of the Fascist régimes. France of the Popular Front and America of Roosevelt and the New Deal are essentially on the same side of the ideological conflict as the Soviet Union, the League, the Left in this country and throughout Europe, the Spanish Government, and the China of the Kuomintang[1]-Communist coalition.

But in the democracies the "ideological conflict" is blurred and confused by various cross-currents of opinion and interest. In the U.S.A. the division between Left and Right is only just beginning to impinge on national politics, and so on America's attitude to foreign affairs. This is due to historical and geographical causes which account for American capitalism being less Imperialist and American opinion more isolationist than in the other Great Powers. Nevertheless the Roosevelt Administration, and the American opinion that supports it, have shown again and again that they would welcome and co-operate with a British policy of rallying the democratic and peace-loving States in the League, with France, Great Britain, and the U.S.S.R. as a nucleus,

[1] The "Kuomintang," or "Chinese People's Party," led the Chinese national revolution in conjunction with the Communists, then broke with them and has now joined up again for resistance to Japanese Imperialism.

for joint resistance to Fascist aggression and a new start with the whole idea of world government and social justice.

In France the Popular Front was from the beginning compelled either to yield to the blackmail of French capitalist reaction (including the Right Wing of the Radicals) over Spain, or to part company with Great Britain. For the "National" Government's policy was from the outset to co-operate with Fascist aggression in Spain by depriving the Spanish Government of arms, in order by these means to prolong the war until it resulted, preferably, in exhaustion and deadlock, but if necessary in a Franco victory, and at a pinch in an Italian military conquest. This policy was humorously called "non-intervention." It was, of course, embraced with enthusiasm by the Right in France, who share our National Government's desire to encompass the defeat of the Spanish Popular Front Government at any cost and by any means.

The French Popular Front Government decided at the beginning that it could not fight the reaction on the international front as well as on the home front, since the reaction could urge as an all-powerful argument the necessity of not risking isolation and separation from Great Britain. Therefore the Popular Front Government sacrificed foreign policy to home policy, and decided never to risk a break with the British Government. As it is impossible to separate home from foreign policy, the result of French subservience to our "National" Government has been to dishearten and divide the supporters of the Popular Front, and to encourage French capitalist reaction and Fascism to take the offensive all along the line. So far the offensive is not serious. But if Spanish democracy, thanks to being starved of arms by France and Great Britain, should be unable to withstand the weight of metal and of men supplied by the Fascist

Powers to the rebels, the French Popular Front would be in for much the same kind of Fascist attack as was made on democracy in Spain. Civil war in France, with Germany and Italy more or less surreptitiously helping the French Fascists, is not impossible in the next slump, as a direct result of the betrayal of Spanish democracy. The "Hooded Men" were only a foretaste.

Because the "national interests" the National Government in this country exists to preserve are the class interests of the rich, and because the real masters of the Government are the plutocracy, the Government were bound to resort to economic nationalism and war preparations, to revert to international anarchy, and to do all in their power to save from defeat every Fascist aggressor since 1931. That was the only Imperial and foreign policy that could defend the Government's "national interests."

In home politics, while in fact being the tool of the plutocracy, the Government claims to be "impartial" as between the different interests and elements in the community. It asserts that it stands for social peace and national unity as against the Socialists, whom it accuses of wanting class-war. It claims it does not take sides between the rich and the poor.

In international affairs it declares that it refuses, in the name of peace, conciliation and "universality," to "take sides in the ideological conflict." This means in practice that it refuses to take sides with loyalty to treaty obligations against repudiation of treaty obligations, with the defenders of the collective system against those who destroy the collective system, with the victim of aggression against the aggressor. At Geneva it has used this country's crucial influence in international affairs to make the League sit on the fence between those who break and those who uphold the Covenant, between the warmakers and those who want peace, between those

who have left the League and those who remain faithful to the League, between the enemies and the friends of peace and civilisation. As a necessary result of this policy the National Government have always acted as the dishonest broker and accomplice of the aggressors, and have invariably tried to patch up a deal with them to preserve what they regard as "national interests" at any price to the victim of aggression, to the League, and to British honour.

That the victims of aggression, the League, and British honour have suffered deadly injury as a result of this policy is not surprising. For the Government deliberately sacrified them to its conception of "national interests." But what is interesting is that even what the Government call "national interests" (i.e. the class and Imperial interests of the rich) have suffered no less. Their crimes have turned out to be also blunders. They deliberately made a mess of the League, but in doing so involuntarily made an equal mess of their pre-war policy of doing Imperialist deals with aggressors. For none of the attempted deals has come off, and all the attempts to divide the Fascist Powers, and buy over one or more of them to the side of British Imperialism, have failed.

The Liberal Government of 1906–14 helped to make the world war inevitable by its power politics and Imperialism. But it did play power politics well enough to ensure that when the war came we had a united nation, a united Empire, half the world on our side, and a cause that at least looked good. Whereas the "National" Government are playing power politics with such crass incompetence that they are not only making the next war inevitable, but losing it before it has begun. They are rapidly producing a situation where we shall find ourselves at war almost single-handed against all three Fascist dictatorships. We shall

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be fighting with a disunited Empire and a divided people, at impossible odds and for obviously immoral ends.

It has been shown how the mere objective fact of the Government representing capitalist reaction in the post-slump world compelled it to go back to international anarchy and Imperialism in foreign policy. But the same objective fact necessarily ensures the failure of this foreign policy. For the post-slump world is very different from the pre-war world.

The League was a new factor, and the smashing up of the League has meant, not a return to pre-war international anarchy, but a state of international chaos that is far worse. The Soviet Union is a new factor which upsets Imperial power politics. Fascism is a diseased social condition, that makes the Fascist régimes far more difficult to conclude " Gentlemen's Agreements " with at the expense of third parties than was the case with the pre-war Great Powers. Democracy has invaded foreign affairs, and is not educated up to understanding that treaty obligations, honour, justice, and mercy do not count in foreign policy, and that the only thing which does count, and for which the common people are expected to shed their blood when necessary, are the interests of the plutocracy.

The rise of national sentiment among colonial and " semi-colonial " peoples is a new factor. Lastly, there is the contradiction between class and Imperial interests, which is also a new factor. In order to play power politics successfully, one must be able not only to offer a rival an Imperialist deal at someone else's expense, but also to threaten him with war if he refuses the offer and goes on injuring one's own Imperial interests. But at any time since 1931 the National Government have not only had their style sadly cramped, when offering " deals," by the existence of the League, public opinion, etc. (just look

at what happened to the Hoare-Laval deal !), but have suffered from an even worse handicap. They could never seriously threaten the aggressor with action leading to his defeat, in order to make him come to terms, for they did not want to come down on the side of the victim of aggression, the League, and the U.S.S.R., and to defeat him. The aggressor always knew this, and exploited his knowledge most unscrupulously by calling their bluff and getting away with it.

How is all this going to end ? There is not, unfortunately, much doubt about that. We are not only in an arms race, but in a runaway arms race, over which the Government have lost control. This arms race is already more than three times greater in cost, and incalculably greater in killing and destroying power, than the arms race that ended in 1914.

The arms race is already pushing up the cost of living. The rise is aggravated by the economic nationalism into which the plutocracy have pushed the Government. It is further aggravated by the profiteering of middle-men, arms manufacturers, and other capitalist vested interests, as well as by the fact that the Government are financing rearmament largely by loans instead of taxation, so as to shift the burden from the rich to the poor. But all this is merely the direct and inevitable consequence of the fundamental fact that this is a Government of the vested interests, by the vested interests, and for the vested interests of the rich. Until that fact is changed, nothing can change the Government's foreign policy, and so the arms race will go on, the cost of living will continue to rise, and we shall go on drifting toward Fascism and war.

The next consequence of the way the world is going will be an exceedingly painful slump. Any serious slackening in the pace of rearmament would already precipitate a slump at once. Therefore it will not occur. The present arms programme will be amended and enlarged

from time to time so as to continue indefinitely. The Government will have the excuse that other countries are still rearming, so they must go on. And the Government's foreign policy will make that excuse always valid. These things will not be foreseen clearly and done deliberately. The Government will be driven in that direction by the blind forces that are its master. Nevertheless, even rearmament cannot for ever stave off another slump. As Sir William Beveridge has put it, with all the authority attaching to his position as Chairman of the Unemployment Assistance Board, "Rearmament cannot cure unemployment unless it ends in a war."

When the slump comes, it will hurt. For, in the first place, it will come on top of a period of falling standards of life and rising costs of living. The workers will therefore scarcely be in a position or in a mood to stand much wage-slashing and victimisation of the unemployed in order to save capitalism and the arms race. In the second place, the defenders of capitalism cannot this time produce any even temporary remedy. Last time they cut wages and unemployment benefit, "axed" social and educational expenditure, raised taxes, piled on tariffs, quotas, and subsidies, and went in for rearmament. They will find it very difficult to do more of all that in the coming slump, and still more difficult to do anything else.

But it would be an error to believe that the Government will ever throw up the sponge for capitalism. Sir Stafford Cripps, in a speech in the House on June 23rd, 1936, showed how the Government have become steadily more reactionary and true-blue Tory year by year. This movement to the Right will speed up as the Government's difficulties increase. In the next slump it will become frankly Die-Hard and oppressive. Seeing no way out by conciliation and concessions, even unreal ones, it will be driven to resort to coercion and to rely on panic

and patriotism. That, in the Government's eyes, will be merely the continuation of the responsibility for "saving the country" which they assumed in the not too scrupulous election of 1931, and shouldered again after the frankly dishonest election of 1935. It would be a capital error to under-estimate the sincerity of the Government's self-righteousness or the depth of their belief in their misson to "save the country" by defending the class interests of the rich at any cost to civilisation and peace.

The third consequence of the arms race, if there is not a change in British foreign policy, will be another great war. In its 1935 election address the Government declared that "Our attitude to the League is dictated by the conviction that collective security can alone save us from a return to the old system which resulted in the Great War." Since then the Government have destroyed collective security by default and returned to the old system of international anarchy, the arms race, and Imperialism, which always has ended, and is bound to end, in war.

In fact the war has already begun. It has been raging for six years, and is getting bigger and nearer all the time. It began in China in 1931, then spread to Abyssinia in 1935, then to Spain in 1936, and then flared up again on a still greater scale in China in 1937. This war is the world-wide offensive of Fascism and Imperialism—that is, of capitalist counter-revolution. In that war the National Government have all along considered it the lesser of two evils to let the aggressor have his way, in the hope that he would then be satisfied, and open to a "deal" for the protection of British Imperial interests. That hope has always been belied. Each time a little war was allowed to rip, it has proved only the prelude to more and bigger wars. Far from being "satisfied," the aggressors have only been encouraged to try again. After Spain and

China there are only Czechoslovakia and an international Fascist offensive in France left before the decks are cleared for a head-on conflict between this country and the Fascist Powers over British Imperial interests.

It is for this conflict the National Government have been preparing since 1932, as revealed by Sir John Simon's confession quoted in the last chapter. Of course, the Government have been hoping against hope that they could stave off this conflict indefinitely. They have been, and are, doing their best to fix up deals with the Fascist Powers to induce them to commit aggression against somebody else rather than against British Imperial interests. They have tried hard to separate the Fascist Powers from each other, and have toyed successively with the idea of making Japan, Germany, or Italy (particularly Italy) an ally of British Imperialism. But all these efforts have failed, and war is drawing closer all the time. And when the conflict comes, because Japan threatens some British colony, concession, or market in the Far East, or Italy challenges our Imperial communications in the Mediterranean or our Near Eastern or African possessions, or Germany wants her colonies back —why, then the Government will not shrink from the supreme sacrifice of any amount of our youngsters. For they are not pacifists. They will not take the slightest risk, even in conjunction with the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R., and France, to uphold the Covenant or the Nine Power Treaty[1] against aggression, for that, in their view, is not a "national interest"; on the contrary, it would hurt the "national interests" they are out to preserve. But they would unhesitatingly take on all three of the Fascist Powers single-handed, and fight to the death for

[1] Concluded at the Washington Conference in 1922 and pledging the U.S.A., France, Great Britain, Japan, and several other States to respect China's territorial and administrative integrity, and her political independence and sovereignty.

the remotest British colony or concession. For such things they do regard as "national interests."

In such a war the three Fascist Powers would undoubtedly stand together. The U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. would equally undoubtedly stand aloof. For neither American opinion nor the Soviet Union has any desire to get mixed up in a conflict of Imperialist interests, where the ideology on both sides would be the same. France and one or two Central European States might be on our side, if the Fascist Powers had not already reduced them to impotence with the goodwill of our "National" Government. But the Government's foreign policy has already turned over to our potential enemies so many strategic positions in the Far East, and the Mediterranean, and lost us so much goodwill and prestige throughout the world, that the situation would be desperate indeed in the kind of war the Government are rapidly making inevitable.

Moreover, no Dominion will, to put it very mildly, fling itself whole-heartedly into such a conflict. It is more probable that most of the Dominions will stand out altogether. There was serious trouble in India in the last war. There is almost sure to be a revolution there in the next. Arab troubles in the Near East and native troubles in Africa will almost certainly break out in case of war.

Nor is the situation at home likely to be very gratifying. Militarily, as the Spanish experience has shown, the war would soon develop into a dead-lock on land (probably somewhere in France, and leaving out side-shows such as colonial campaigns and revolutions), which both sides would attempt to break by starving and air-bombing each others' civilian populations. In the circumstances the civilian populations would be likely soon to show inconvenient curiosity as to why they got into the war and what they were supposed to be fighting about.

In this country the National Government, having

destroyed the League by refusing ever to take any real risk for it, can hardly hope to be believed if they invoke its ghost as justification for fighting a world war. As they will go " totalitarian " at the outbreak of war, and as they have always refused to " take sides in the ideological conflict " by defending democracy anywhere against Fascist aggression, they will find it hard to make the war appear a struggle between democracy and Fascism.

Soon after war had begun, the " National " Government would become a War-Office—Big Business—Die-Hard dictatorship, which would impose industrial and military conscription and a rigid censorship. This régime would shortly be more afraid of ending the war than of going on. The Fascist régimes it was fighting, and which it would resemble more and more as the hostilities proceeded, would be in exactly the same position. For no conceivable peace terms could save the belligerent Governments from the wrath of their peoples. In the last war there was a big enough difference to save the victors —but only just—from the revolutions that overtook the vanquished. But in the next war, if fought on a national and Imperial basis, there will be no victors, but only degrees of defeat. Therefore Lord Baldwin was right when he said at Bewdley on April 20th, 1936: " I have often uttered the truism that the next war will be the end of civilisation in Europe. . . . I believe that . . . when that war came to an end the raging peoples of every country, torn with passion, suffering, and horror, would wipe out every Government in Europe, and you would have a state of anarchy from end to end of it as man's protest against wickedness in high places."

That is why the Governments which to-day cannot stop the arms race or put an end to the danger of war—for they depend on them for survival—will, when war begins, be compelled to go on fighting and maintaining

an iron dictatorship over their peoples, because peace would sign their death-warrants. The war for them will become an end in itself, and its prolongation their only hold on life.

The National Government have since 1931 already taken this country, and helped to take the world, a long way toward Armageddon. They have done so, not because they wanted to, but because they saw no other way of acting in order to save the existing social and economic order. Their worst moral fault is that they are fatalists about want and war—they do not believe either can be abolished, for, indeed, they cannot without abolishing the power and privileges of the rich.

The most terrifying thing about the drift to war is the helplessness of the Governments that are drifting. This helplessness is particularly marked in the case of the National Government. It wants peace. But it will end, unless Conservatism is put out of office and the plutocracy out of business in time, with landing us in a great war which it will be as powerless to stop as to prevent. Once we are in the war, the immediate enemy will be Fascism in this country. The war will last for years, and the only way out of the murderous deadlock will be by revolution.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHOICE BEFORE US

THE CAUSES OF THE LEAGUE'S FAILURE analysed in the previous chapters, and the facts of the world situation revealed in that analysis, show plainly enough what ought to be done to stop the drift to war, and who alone can do it.

World government is still the only alternative to world war. War is so appalling that any risk or sacrifice is worth

while in order to make a new start with the idea of world government. The only country that can take the lead, and that other countries expect to take the lead, and would follow if it did, is this country.

The connection between social justice and world government is clearer and closer than ever before. The struggle for and against social justice has become the central issue in both home and world politics. The States, economic classes, and political parties that are against social justice for the workers are also against the idea of world government, and for Imperialism and power politics.

Therefore it is necessary to abandon the illusion that the policy of establishing some form of world government can be pursued by co-operation between all existing States, or will be supported within the State by all parties and classes. It is necessary, on the contrary, to realise that in order to go ahead with the idea of world government we must take sides with the forces of the Left and with the Soviet Union in the ideological conflict.

That means that the first step to peace is to put Labour into power in this country and to put the plutocracy out of business at least to the extent called for by Labour's Immediate Programme. The mere coming in of a Labour Government here would send a thrill of hope throughout the forces of the Left in the whole world. It would at one stroke create a new atmosphere, similar to, but much stronger than, that created by Roosevelt's New Deal and the victory of the French Popular Front.

Here are the main lines of a policy for a new start with the League: a British initiative for joint action with the United States and as many members of the League as possible to prohibit all imports from Japan and to put an embargo on any credits or any export of war materials to Japan. This should be accompanied by giving the

Chinese Government every facility for acquiring and importing arms and munitions, and by proposing at Geneva and asking the United States to endorse a statement declaring Japan the aggressor and undertaking not only not to recognise any Japanese rights in any Chinese territory seized, but also to maintain the above-mentioned export and import prohibitions until Japanese forces had been wholly withdrawn from Chinese territory.

A British proposal to the Council of the League that (*a*) The Council should declare that the present situation in Spain constitutes external aggression against the territorial integrity and existing political independence of Spain in contravention of Article 10 of the Covenant;[1] (*b*) Should advise the members of the League that it was their duty under this Article to supply the Spanish Government with all the arms, aeroplanes, and volunteers they need to preserve their territorial integrity and political independence against this external aggression; (*c*) Should ask Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, Spain, and one or two other suitable Powers to act as a Council sub-committee in order to organise the flow of supplies to Spain; (*d*) Should request the British and French Governments to extend the protection of the Nyon anti-piracy agreements to Spanish Government shipping and territorial waters, to treat rebel warships and aeroplanes as pirates, and to capture and hand over to the Spanish Government all merchant vessels flying the Spanish rebel flag. Close touch should be maintained with the U.S.A.

The British Government should further take the initiative in proposing at the League, and getting the United

[1] By which the members of the League undertake to respect and to preserve against external aggression each other's territorial integrity and existing political independence. In case of any such aggression, or even threat or danger of such aggression, it is the Council's duty to advise the members of the League on what action they should take.

States to endorse, a resolution undertaking not to recognise the Italian conquest of Abyssinia, and not to lend Italy any money in any circumstances so long as Italian forces occupied any Abyssinian territory.

In no case would Great Britain be acting alone. In every case she would be acting through the League and in conjunction with the United States. In every case she would as a first step secure the agreement of France and the Soviet Union. In no case would she commit, or propose that others should commit, acts of war against any of the Fascist Powers. In every case the action she would propose to take against the wars of aggression waged by these Powers would be collective, and wholly economic and pacific in character. Therefore this policy would not involve any appreciable risk of war. But it would change the face of the world and stop the drift to war in six months.

These measures for putting an end to the present wars of aggression, stopping the drift to war, and restoring the reign of law, would go hand in hand with the following measures for rebuilding the League:

(*a*) Great Britain would accept the obligations of the Franco-Soviet Pact and the U.S.S.R. would accept the obligations of Locarno for a period long enough to allow of

(*b*) The conclusion of a Treaty of Non-Aggression, Pacific Settlement of all Disputes, and Mutual Assistance, based on the Covenant and open to any European member of the League, and

(*c*) The formation of a group of States prepared to accept very far-reaching obligations for pooled defence, including a common command for their air forces, and joint control of their civil aviation and war industries; measures of common economic planning and progressive mutual reduction of tariffs; the putting of all non-self-governing colonies under an advanced form of the

mandate system, intended as a transitional stage to fit these communities for governing themselves; far-reaching and constant political co-operation, not only between the Governments but through an International Advisory Parliament to which the Parliaments of this group of States would elect delegations by proportional representation and on a scale varying with the size of the country concerned. Membership in this group would be open to any signatory of the European Treaty that accepted the obligations involved—in some cases with reservations on military commitments. France, Great Britain, and the U.S.S.R. would be the nucleus of this group.

This group would jointly assume the leadership in the League and in world affairs. It would soon rally all the surviving democracies in Europe, and bring over to its side and into the European Treaty the belt of new States between the Soviet Union and Germany, stretching from the Baltic to the Balkans. It would secure the hearty goodwill and full diplomatic and economic co-operation of the U.S.A., and might even aspire to bring that great country into some form of loose and consultative association with the League. It would through the League secure the economic and political co-operation of the Latin American States.

Even with only the British and French Empires, the U.S.S.R., and the surviving European democracies (the Belgian and Dutch Empires, Spain, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden), this group would include nearly half (43·9 per cent) of the world's population, and over half (57·8 per cent) of the earth's surface, as compared with just over one-tenth (10·9 per cent) of the world's population and a miserable 3·1 per cent of the earth for the Fascist Powers. In raw materials, foodstuffs, national wealth and resources, gold supplies, industrial power, armaments, and means for making

armaments, this " world peace union " would similarly have a crushing superiority over all the Fascist Powers put together—even without counting the co-operation of the U.S.A., Latin America, and the Central European States.

This group of States or " World Peace Union " would use its decisive power to mobilise the League against any and all acts of aggression by the Fascist States. It would give clear warning that this was its policy, that it regarded peace as indivisible, and the maintenance of the reign of law as a question of honour and vital interests, and that it would not tolerate aggression anywhere in the world.

At the same time it would go on pressing the Fascist Powers to return to the League. It would offer them any guarantees they wanted that their frontiers would be respected and they would not be attacked. It would press on them treaties of non-aggression and arbitration. It would offer them, in return for agreeing to the reduction, limitation, and international control of the armaments and arms industries of all countries, and for accepting the obligations of the collective system, the economic and financial advantages of the low tariff and common economic planning and investment group.

So long as the Fascist States remained Fascist, they would decline these offers. But the more they declined them, and the more the World Peace Union went ahead without them, raised the standard of living of its own populations, and made aggression a hopeless prospect, the more shaky would become the internal position of the Fascist régimes. The end would be domestic upheavals that would put an end to the menace of Fascism and war for ever, and expand the World Peace Union into a real World Government based on social justice for the workers.

Those are the lines of a constructive policy that is not only feasible, but the only possible alternative to

continuing the present drift to Fascism and war. Under this policy the risk of war, which is great and growing to-day, will progressively diminish, and at last disappear. And if at any stage in this policy war we were attacked—which is highly unlikely—we should have such powerful allies and such national and Imperial unity due to a good cause that victory would be certain.

On the other hand, the National Government's policy since 1931 has year by year increased the danger of war, and made our position worse when war comes, in spite of all our rearming. Ultimately war is certain unless the Government's policy changes, and when it comes we shall have few or no allies, be fighting all three Fascist Powers, and have a purely Imperialist cause which will not command the loyalty of either the whole British Commonwealth or of the whole British people.

Those are the alternatives between which the people of this country must choose. They should make their choice with full knowledge of the fact that no war can be fought without the willing co-operation of organised Labour, and that no one can force organised Labour against its will to support a war for the class interests of the rich—that is, for Imperialism.

Unless and until the Government take at least the first step to re-building the collective system, by accepting the obligations of the Franco-Soviet pact, pending the negotiation of a wider settlement, the Empire is militarily and morally indefensible. The best way to preserve this country from the horrors of war is therefore to refuse to fight for the Empire. For, as Mr. Attlee said at Brighton in 1935, if "we are so weak and so foolish that we are going to be made tools of by this Government and led up the garden path of Imperialism again . . . we shall deserve our fate."